
A Step into The Past

Book 05

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Chapter 1

The dinner feast at Guo residence

Tiny snowflakes filled the sky, the weather bitterly cold. Luckily there were no gusts of wind or it'll feel even more terrible.

Wu Zhuo, Xiang Shaolong and over 10 odd men on horses left the residence hurriedly, all of them were wearing bamboo hats that covered most of their faces. Once they reached the streets they split ways immediately, 2 to a group, all traveling towards different directions. Firstly it's the 3 horse carriages, now there is this move to trick the enemy. Even if Yan Ping's 300 men are all waiting outside the residence, it's difficult for them to follow so many 'suspicious characters' at the same time. Besides who can be certain whether Xiang Shaolong is one of them.

This move is to force Yan Ping's Mohist warriors to retreat to the Guo's residence where the dense forest and the road leading up the hill is. Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo traveled a well planned route and swiftly left the forested area outside the Wu residence and arrived at the side of the main road where other common residences are. They did not travel towards the Guo residence but instead turned left in the opposite direction in spite of the snow. They did not care if they were being followed and when they reached the front of a large house, they gave the secret signal.

The door to the house immediately opened. The owner of this big house is someone who has strong relations with the Wu residence and naturally he

was glad to assist them. The 2 of them did not say anything at all but just entered the house and went to the back alley from the building's backdoor. Only then did they hurriedly ride towards Xiuyue Hill where the Guo residence is situated. It was Wu Zhuo who arranged all these so that even if they were being followed, they can still beautifully shake off the other party.

The snow hit their faces and Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt lost. Although it's only been a few short years since he arrived in this ancient era, but he has experienced many heart-rending tragedies. Shu'er and Su Nu's unjust deaths have given him a huge blow! But Zhao Ni's horrible death is something that he cannot accept even now! But it's another cruel and heartless fact!

Suddenly, these 3 blossoming beauties will forever disappear from this world and even if he killed Zhao Mu and Prince Shaoyuan, this fact will never change. Now his great benefactor Yuan Zong is confirmed to be dead as well. Hai! What is all these for?

He can be killed at any time as well, and will that be a form of release? Will there be a chance to see them again after he's dead. Ever since the beginning of life, the question of life and death have always troubled humans. Is it only a short journey where one throws oneself into, and a person's existence will not stop when he dies. No one has ever been able to answer or prove this question. A religion's answer where heaven and hell, or anything outside life and death, may very well just be an optimistic wish. But it's something that one cannot do without, if there is only emptiness after death, it's a situation which is very difficult to accept.

Wu Zhuo who was riding next to him called out, "Young Grand Master-in-

law! Xiuyue hill is right ahead." Xiang Shaolong was woken from his reverie and gathered his thoughts, looking ahead. By now they have left the residential areas and come to the foot of the hill. There's only one road which leads straight to the top of the hill and at the top ancient trees made up a forest and he could catch peeps of the huge building through the trees, looking extremely majestic. However there are no traces of men in ambush and there's an archway at the foot of the hill, written on it are the words 'Guo Family Residence' but there are no guards there at all.

The 2 of them turned to the woods at the side of the road and dismounted where Teng and Jing have left markings of the secret signal. The trees and grass were all covered by white snow and the scene looked pure and alluring but it's not advantageous for hiding or escape at all. Wu Zhuo found another carved signal at the foot of another tree and made a hand signal towards Xiang Shaolong first before going into the woods.

Xiang Shaolong put the Mohist sword in the brocade cloth Zhao Qian made for him and strapped it on his back and with his left hand holding his recovered Flying Rainbow, went after Wu Zhuo. Suddenly men and light appeared and surrounded them quietly. Wu Zhuo drew the 2 metal bars from his back and with a roar charged towards the front suddenly, not allowing the enemy to get a better feel of the surrounding area and strengthen their encirclement.

Xiang Shaolong was still feeling upset about the death of his beloved beauties and Yuan Zong, so he was filled with fury as he pulled out his wooden sword and held it on his right hand as he followed behind and killed a path towards the woods. Their opponents did not expect them to be so ferocious. Of the 2

Zhao Mohists who were blocking Wu Zhuo, one of them took a step back in frenzy while the other came charging with his long sword.

There was a ‘clang’ as the weapons clashed and sparks flew in the darkness. Wu Zhuo took advantage of the fact that his opponent’s arm strength is not as good as his so he flicked the long sword away, creating an opening at his enemy’s front and made a false move as if to attack another person but the metal bar in his left hand turned back and struck the opening as quick as lightning. That person is quite formidable as well, he moved his sword back to defend and blocked the metal bar but he forgot about the other metal bar on Wu Zhuo’s right hand. He only saw a flash while Wu Zhuo bent his waist as the metal bar struck upwards into his opponent’s stomach.

That Mohist did not expect the angle of Wu Zhuo’s attack to be so precise and with a scream, staggered backwards as fresh blood spilled on the snow and he died immediately. Wu Zhuo did not stop at all as his 2 metal bars seem to transform into 2 rays of light as he charged forward towards the other Mohist. The battle has finally started.

All these Mohists were highly skilled but they did not expect that an unknown Wu Zhuo would kill one of their men in such a short time. They were all furious and charged upon him and for a moment the air was filled with a murderous aura. Xiang Shaolong who was following closely behind Wu Zhuo went into the state of Mohist swordplay, every move his enemy makes is very clear to him. Because their swordplay all came from the same source, he is very familiar with his enemy’s attack and could even see their loopholes and inadequacies.

He roared as Flying Rainbow pierced and pricked madly in his left hand while in his right hand the Mohist sword slashed and sliced heavily, his left and right hands actually executing 2 different styles of fighting and strength, gentle and harsh at the same time. A furious fire burned in his eyes but his expression was cool and calm, as if he's another person altogether, his aura extremely imposing. As the weapons clashed, 3 Mohists were struck down at the same time, one of them injured by Wu Zhuo's bars while the other 2 were naturally felled by Xiang Shaolong.

A loud shout came from Xiang Shaolong's right side. An especially tall and huge Mohist who looks like he's of a higher rank came out from behind a tree, leaning forward and running furiously. Under the torch his metal pole glittered and was aimed towards Xiang Shaolong's heart, the aim accurate, vicious and swift. Xiang Shaolong saw that he revealed no loopholes at all as he moved and knows that he has met an expert in Mohism. He dared not be lax and with his left hand he executed one of the Mohist's 3 killer strikes 'Defending instead of attacking' with Flying Rainbow. He moved his sword back, it's tip quivering, where his next attack will be still an unknown as he dealt with the 2 Mohist coming towards his left. He executed 'Attacking instead of defending' with the Mohist sword on his right as the sword seemed to turn into a beam of light and curved forward like a swimming snake as it engaged his opponent's metal pole.

The Mohist swordplay is useful as it allows a single person to fight against overpowering numbers so although he was dealing with attacks from 2 different sides, he was not at all confused. Also it relies on intuition rather than the eyes so that even if one's eyes were covered, he can still fight with the enemy. In such dark surroundings with only a few torches illuminating

things at the perimeter, it's even more beneficial to Xiang Shaolong. That Mohist with the pole did not expect Xiang Shaolong to suddenly execute such an exquisite move and only felt his frighteningly strong pole attack which is akin to a dragon bursting out of a cave, upon meeting his opponent's wooden sword, felt like a clay ox entering the water, empty and surreal, without any strength at all.

He was surprised and reflexively pulled his pole back and retreated when he realized there's a sharp pain on his stomach. It turned out that Xiang Shaolong has given a flying kick to his fatal point. Although his tolerance for pain is 10 times more than the average warrior, he still howled in pain as he fell backwards, never to climb up again. Naturally this kick has got nothing to do with the 3 killer strikes of Mohism, because for someone from the 21st century, naturally he will not stick so strictly to the rules.

The 2 Mohists on the other side thought that Xiang Shaolong is now on the defensive so they waved their swords to attack but did not expect that with a sudden glare of light, one of them had their right hand chopped off at the wrist while the other was struck in his thigh and as the retreated screaming, they knocked into the others advancing behind them and the situation was chaotic for a moment. Who would have expected Xiang Shaolong's swordplay to be so precise and vicious, a total deviation from the gentle nature of the Mohist swordplay.

Wu Zhuo's performance was not any worse either as he forced his way between 2 enemies, his hands moved to the middle of his metal rods as he executed close bodily moves. Although his enemy managed to slash him slightly on his arm, at the same time he pierced through one of his enemy's

chest while another enemy's ear was hit by the end of the metal rod.

In a short moment they have advanced a few feet. They heard a twang behind them. They hid behind a tree at the same time as an arrow shot past. Although they've killed many of their opponents, but the Mohists still continued to advance towards them from all directions in waves and the situation was not to their advantage. Xiang Shaolong saw that the situation was not right and returned Flying Rainbow to its scabbard and he reached into his robes to pull out the flying needles, shooting them continuously. This move was greatly unexpected by the others and for a moment quite a handful of people fell to the ground.

His opponents saw that wherever Xiang Shaolong waved his hand at, someone will be injured or killed, like magic and they all hurriedly hid behind trees. The 2 of them dared not hesitate and advanced towards the darkness and in a moment was hidden deep in the forest. The Mohists were all thrown off but they still gave chase.

Now there's another problem. With such running and in the darkness, how are they able to see the secret signals left behind by Teng and Jing. Luckily right at this time, the sound of a bird calling was heard from afar on their left, which sounded very authentic. The 2 of them knows it must be that mischievous and tricky Jing Jun who is making the sound so they happily made their way towards the sound.

The deeper they went into the woods the denser it became with thick snow, making it extremely difficult to walk. After butting of countless branches, there was a small light in the sky ahead, which dropped like a meteor. It

turned out to be Jing Jun who jumped down effortlessly and blinked at them, saying, "This way!" The 2 of them hurriedly went after him as if they've found their savior.

The walked up a slope and came to a huge rock. They could almost make out the lights coming from the Guo residence amongst the woods ahead. Teng Yi suddenly appeared on the stone, with one knee on the ground and holding a huge bow in his hand. He looked serious as he scrutinized the human sounds and torches that's coming nearer. The tree of them went behind him.

Wu Zhuo asked in puzzlement, "What are you going to do?" Teng Yi did not reply. Wu and Xiang were perplexed, they can't see the enemy clearly in this dense forest, so what is the use of having a strong bow? Down below screams were heard. Jing Jun exclaimed happily, "They fell in!"

Both of them are excellent hunters so naturally they are expert in setting traps. 'Twang!' An arrow left Teng Yi's strong bow and shot into the dense forest. A scream was immediately heard. Impressed, Jing Jun said, "Brother Teng's 'Arrow of the night forest' is famed throughout the Han borders, even a passing rat would not be able to avoid it."

As he spoke, Teng Yi released 3 arrows continuously with alarming ease and dexterity and every time a shot was launched, a scream will definitely be heard. By now Xiang and Wu realized that there's no trace of torches below at all. It turns out that Teng Yi has shot all the torch bearers and the torches fell onto the snowy ground and were extinguished. Teng Yi continued shooting his arrows, and each arrow will definitely find a target. Wu and Xiang were utterly impressed and secretly thought that luckily he is not their

enemy, or else they won't even know how they have died.

Teng Yi put down his strong bow and said calmly, "No one will dare to come up now!" Jing Jun jumped up and said, "We've tied ropes and cut up a path so we only have to follow the rope and soon we'll be at the Guo residence for the feast." Xiang Shaolong did not expect to come out of the Zhao Mohist's encirclement so easily, and obviously saw that it's extremely important to have good strategies.

Once he thought that he can now try the prowess of the 3 killer strikes on Yan Ping, he was greatly energized and said quietly, "Let's go!" The Guo family residence was built on top of the hill, following the curves of the hill. Although it's not comparable to the Wu stockade's imposing and strict aura, it boasts of the beautiful scenery that the Wu stockade lacks. In front of the residence there were 2 ancient trees that almost reached heaven, lanterns burned brightly at the front door with more lanterns hung on the walls on both sides, making it look as bright as day. Xiang Shaolong informed them of his name at the door and immediately a middle-aged man who introduced himself as the housekeeper Gao Ang came and led them into the residence personally.

Walking past a stone pathway through a bamboo forest, an imposing looking building suddenly appeared in front of them. Just a look at the building they know that Guo Zhong's wealth is comparable to those of royalty. Lanterns filled the spacious garden on both sides of the road, the layout complimenting each other, making them feel that the 20 odd feet of long stone path beneath their feet is the middle line in the residence and the opulent building before them is situated right in the middle of this garden.

There are 2 pavilions in the garden, built on top of a rectangular pond with magnificent looking pillars and red tiled roof and at the tip of the roof there's an magnificent looking cover made of white stone. Exquisite carvings can be seen on the beams. Regardless of the rare flowers and trees, the tiny bridges and flowing water, the quaint pathways, just these 2 pavilions alone is enough for one to appreciate the builder's taste and skill.

A lot of thought was put into the decoration of plants in the garden, with the main roles delegated to everlasting trees, which can withstand the cold, matched with trees that change with the season and flowers which bloom all year round, making it a lush greenery. Although the garden is now filled with snow, it still makes one think of the beautiful spring/ summer scenery. Once in a while they could see rare rocks brought in from other places, which increased the exquisiteness of the garden. The main residence looked even more imposing among the garden, almost comparable to the Zhao palace. It's so imposing that it's almost unbelievable.

Jing Jun who has lived almost all his life in the mountains was dumbfounded and went close to Xiang Shaolong and whispered, "Such a large house, how is one able to sleep in it?" Xiang Shaolong saw that the housekeeper Gao Ang was way ahead of them leading the way and can't hear their conversation so he replied with a laugh, "Hugging a beauty, do you fear not being able to sleep?" Jing Jun immediately rose his eyebrows, obviously he's thinking of the program tonight after going back to the Wu residence.

Xiang Shaolong thought of the Zhao palace and can't help but think of the perished Zhao Ni, remembering how he flirted with her in the royal garden. He felt a sharp pain in his heart and felt like stabbing himself to relieve that

heart wrenching pain. Later he still have to put up an act with Zhao Mu, how will he be able to stand it? Teng Yi saw him suddenly turning pale and understood his feelings. He reached out and grabbed his shoulder hard, saying, "The big picture is of most importance." The 2 of them exchanged a look, and a feeling of camaraderie welled up in them.

Xiang Shaolong suppressed the pain in his heart and forced all thoughts out of his mind as he stepped up the wooden bridge, up the long flight of stairs, into the building. There were 16 tables in the building, split between the left and right side of the great hall. By the time Xiang Shaolong and his men arrived, the other guests are already there. Guo Zhong hurriedly came to welcome them and introduce him to the others. Zhao Mu brought a group of his family warriors to show off and all of them looked fierce and strong, obviously skilled swordsmen. He and his men, 12 of them altogether, already took up 4 tables.

Yan Ping was dressed in white hemp clothing and alone, and for a change he was wearing a pair of straw shoes, an air of a proud and suave loner. If not for the barrier of Yuan Zong's revenge stuck between them, maybe Xiang Shaolong could have befriended him but now they can only solve the problem using this era's most commonly used method, which is through fights.

For the first time he met the owner of the Zhao warrior association Zhao Ba. From the name he thought he'd be a huge burly man but in face he is a lot shorter than the average person, but with big bones. Everything was expanding horizontally, wide chest and broad back with an especially thick neck and with his slightly hunched back he formed a very impressionable

piece of triangular muscle, making one think that even if you try to strangle him, there's no way you can manage to cut off his air supply. His complexion was dark, his forehead protruding with a square face and huge eyes. It felt as if he has unlimited strength in his body and as he moved he gave off an imposing aura which created an impression on Xiang Shaolong as well. When he was in the special task force, fighting is as common as eating so he's good at analyzing his opponents. When he saw Zhao Ba, he immediately put him under the most difficult to handle enemy category.

Four of his disciples accompanied him to the feast and naturally they are all expert swordsmen but what caught their attention was one of them is actually a young lady called Zhao Zhi. At first glance she did not have the beauty to captivate one's soul but her face hides an indescribable sadness, matched with her shockingly dainty phoenix eyes, slim face and sexy lips, she does exude a womanly charm. Especially when she's so tall, a head taller than Zhao Ba and only about 3 inches shorter than Xiang Shaolong. Such a tall lady and with a perfect body trained from constant exercising, it makes her look extremely outstanding.

Zhao Ba, Zhao Zhi and their people all behaved coolly towards Xiang Shaolong, only giving a slight nod of their heads during the introduction, not hiding their animosity at all. When Jing Jun can't help but scrutinize Zhao Zhi from head to toe, the lady looked even more unhappy and a murderous look flashed past her pretty eyes. Jing Jun was so shocked he dared not look at her again. The other 2 guests are obviously Zhao Mu's main lackeys.

The philosopher Guo Kai looked like a Taoist deity, with an extremely long beard but his eyes were darting and just like what Lady Ya said, he looks

conniving but he was the warmest towards Xiang Shaolong compared to the rest. What leaves a deep impression is his feminine and shrill voice. General Yue Cheng and Guo Kai are both about 30 years old, his eyes kept opening and closing and was alternating between lively and lifeless looks. He gives one the impression that he's engrossed in wine and women, with a slim body and nimble limbs. His military outfit gave him an imposing aura. Both of them have their family servants with them and took up 4 tables.

Coming up next is Guo Zhong's 2 sons, Guo Qiu and Guo Ting, who looks thoroughly plain. Instead what caught their attention was this intelligent looking person among their family warriors called Shang Qi. His aura and grace exudes the obvious fact that he's smart and experienced, not someone to be belittled. After a round of introductions, Guo Zhong invited the guests to be seated. Firstly he asked Xiang Shaolong to be seated on the VIP table which is the first table on the right. Xiang Shaolong tried to reject unsuccessfully so he had no choice but to sit at this table meant for the main guest. Seated opposite him is naturally the host Guo Zhong, followed by Zhao Mu, Zhao Ba and Guo Kai.

Seated along the row on Xiang Shaolong's side is the very solemn looking Yan Ping, followed by Yue Cheng. Guo Zhong's 2 sons were seated right at the end. The truth is even up to now, Xiang Shaolong has no idea why Guo Zhong would organize this feast. If he was really injured earlier, it would not reflect well on Guo Zhong as well. After a round of drinks...

Guo Zhong exclaimed happily, "My whole life was spent next to a furnace making steel, now that I'm older, all the heavy work has been passed to my sons. Now in my free time I will trek around the forests, looking at iron

mines, studying the making of weapons. To me, nothing is more precious than the hand written records of the late saint Lu Gong. This time Shaolong has returned with the treasure, others may not know what a great contribution Shaolong has made but I am very clear about that. Come! Let us drink a toast to the comeback of great Zhao." Everyone lifted their cups except for Yan Ping who did not touch the excellent wine on his table at all. Xiang Shaolong secretly lamented that once Guo Zhong said this, he's obviously implying that Zhao's rise and fall will all depend on him. In this era where people fight over power and status, how can such words not around jealousy in others.

Indeed a look of unhappiness flashed past Zhao Mu and Yue Cheng's faces while Zhao Ba looked ferocious. Only Guo Kai remained smiling while Yan Ping looked totally listless. Xiang Shaolong secretly observed the unique Zhao Zhi, every time she lifted her cup she only took a tiny sip, unlike the others who emptied their cups. Wu Zhuo whispered in Xiang Shaolong's ears, "Guo Zhong is trying to cause harm to you!" Xiang Shaolong nodded to show that he understood, and said loudly his thanks, "Mister Guo has flattered me. I am just trying my best to follow his Majesty's and Marquis orders and they gave all instructions. I was just a little lucky and did not fail in my mission. I think this toast should be offered to Marquis instead." Everyone hurriedly rose their cups towards Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong and his men were of course secretly cursing as they drank, scolding Zhao Mu for being a cruel, conniving thief. That beauty Zhao Zhi did not expect Xiang Shaolong to give such a good reply and a look of surprise flashed past her eyes as she quietly sized up Xiang Shaolong. Zhao Mu's expression looked better as he chortled and happily drank up, as if all the

merits should belong to him. But everyone knows that with his character, he will not be so easily taken in by Xiang Shaolong's words and this superficial happiness is just a show put up for them.

Guo Zhong signaled the housekeeper Gao Ang who was standing behind him and the latter immediately passed the orders down. More than 10 odd pretty maids wearing butterfly looking outfits came out carrying piping hot, delicious food and placed them on the tables and warmly helped the guests top up their wine cups. Xiang Shaolong kept a close eye on Yan Ping and saw that there are only vegetables and rice on his table. Obviously Guo Zhong has made special preparations for his 'needs'. Guo Zhong chortled and said, "There have always been dance courtesans entertaining my guests during my feasts but since Juzi is willing to give me face today by attending this feast, there are slight changes in the program."

He clapped his hands hard. Suddenly 10 odd women came out from the 2 side doors at the back, a few of them came to the center of the hall and started performing various dangerous and exciting acrobatic stunts. 2 of the women were impossibly turning somersaults on the shoulders of another 2 women, exchanged places before standing on the shoulders of another girl standing opposite them. Everyone except for Yan Ping clapped and cheered. Jing Jun boasted quietly, "They should clap only after they've seen my skills!"

Xiang Shaolong smiled. Jing Jun is after all a big kid and filled with the desire to win. After the women performed their ever changing acrobatics, they retreated out of the hall amidst the clapping of the guests. Guo Zhong smiled, "The person whom we should really cheer is Miss Zhi. The skills of my maids here, were all taught by her." On hearing that everyone hurriedly cheered for

Zhao Zhi, with Jing Jun being the loudest, making one feel at a loss whether to laugh or be angry. Zhao Zhi stood up and quietly acknowledged them, as if she doesn't care for such admiration at all, giving one the feeling that she has a lot of self-control.

Guo Zhong suddenly coughed dryly and asked Xiang Shaolong seriously, "I heard that there is a slight misunderstanding between Shaolong and Juzi, why don't I be the mediator and solve this problem." Xiang Shaolong was secretly hating him. Guo Zhong's words all seem to be for his good, but in fact he is fanning the flames and trying to incite unhappiness. The reason is of course due to Xiang Shaolong's relationship with the Wu family. Just a few words and it has put him in an embarrassing situation. Even if he hands them the Juzi token immediately, he will offend Zhao Mu because he has kept the fact that he actually has the token hidden from this evil fiend. But if he does not allow Guo Zhong to become the 'mediator', Guo Zhong will have an excuse to deal with him.

Luckily Yan Ping said coldly, "Mister Guo it's too late for you to be a mediator now. Now the problem between me and Commander Xiang can only be solved according to Mohist rules." Everyone knows without asking that a duel is the only way. How can all these powerful people in Handan not know about the Zhao Mohists trying to ambush Xiang Shaolong, and they also understood that Yan Ping has suffered a huge setback and this has planted an unsolvable enmity between them.

Zhao Mu said, "One is the most esteemed guest of his Majesty while the other is the most doted imperial guard of his Majesty, no one would want to see any side hurt. Why don't I report to his Majesty tomorrow and let him

decide?" Guo Kai and Yue Cheng were secretly chortling in their hearts. Yan Ping is well respected in Zhao and recently he made a great contribution at the city of Fuyi when the Yans invaded them and is now on a same standing as the king of Zhao. If this matter is put to him, the person who lose out will definitely be Xiang Shaolong. How can this wily old fox Guo Zhong not know what they are thinking about.

The animosity between him and the Wu family is not a recent thing and he was the one who revealed to the King of Zhao about Wu Yingyuan and Lu Buwei's relationship. Now that the Wu family has such a formidable Young Grand-Master-in-law, he has to destroy him no matter what. At first he did not understand Zhao Mu's stand but after testing him thru their conversation, they immediately came to a quiet understanding. But now King Xiaocheng regards Xiang Shaolong very highly and he has the support of Master Wu as well so they cannot openly deal with this young swordsman who was an unknown but has now become a person of standing.

Zhao Mu first tried the plan of testing the Princess's virginity but did not expect Empress Jing to have other plans and she helped Xiang Shaolong hide the truth. Therefore he chose the highly skilled Yan Ping who has many expert fighters under him and told him that no Juzi token was found on Yuan Zong in order to cause friction between them. Then he allowed Guo Zhong to organize this feast as a cover, but in fact it's to create the perfect chance for Yan Ping to kill him. Such ongoing vicious plans is indeed formidable. Once Zhao Mu said that, Yan Ping was the first to object, "I appreciate Marquis kind intention, but the Juzi token is our sect's ultimate treasure and it cannot be in the hands of an outsider a moment longer. This matter must be settled immediately." Everyone was secretly happy, knowing that Yan Ping will

immediately challenge Xiang Shaolong to a duel.

Zhao Ba laughed loudly and after everyone's attention was on him, said, "The duel between Commander Xiang and Lian Jin has shocked the entire Zhao region. A pity I was at another place testing the skills of the warriors of the school and could not witness the grand event, which up to now is a regret for me. My men are hoping to witness Commander Xiang's excellent sword skill. This is purely going to be an exchange of pointers and I hope that Commander Xiang would graciously give your advice." Wu Zhuo and the rest furrowed their brows, how can there be such an unfair situation in the world, aren't they trying to wear him down one by one? Besides, with Yan Ping testing Xiang Shaolong's skills first, it will be greatly beneficial to the later opponents.

Unexpectedly, Zhao Zhi stood up and with her sword came to Xiang Shaolong's table and said with a smile, "Would Commander please give me your pointers!" Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, what enmity does he have with her, that she'd actually challenge him? He was about to reject when Teng Yi gave Jing Jun, who was raring to duel, an eye signal. That lad jumped up happily, his feet tapping on the table, made a somersault in the air over Zhao Zhi's head and landed behind her, saying with a grin, "If there's anything your disciple will do the work for you. The master will fight with the master, the disciple will fight with the disciple. Let me have some fun with Miss Zhi." Xiang Shaolong and the rest saw that this lad is suddenly now his disciple, and he is sprouting nonsensical and flirtatious words as well and they all thought it funny. The others saw that Jing Jun is as nimble as a monkey and were all secretly startled, secretly thinking that Zhao Zhi has met her match this time. Because Zhao Zhi is famed in Handan for her

nimbleness.

Zhao Ba has always thought highly of himself and secretly thought that Xiang Shaolong is not good enough to be placed on par with him. He was quietly furious and said icily, "Xiao Zhi will exchange pointers with this little lad than!" Zhao Zhi knows that her teacher is hinting to her not to show mercy, and also because she's always hated men who tried to flirt with her so she acknowledged the order and turned around fiercely, her long sword piercing forward as fast as lightning, aiming right at Jing Jun's heart. Her pose was exquisite yet the moves were swift and vicious, it is indeed top rated swordsmanship.

Everyone saw her sudden attack and thought that Jing Jun would certainly be caught unawares and thus unable to avoid her. Even Xiang Shaolong and Wu Zhuo's hearts almost jumped to their throats, afraid that something will happen to him. Only Teng Yi remained expressionless like Yan Ping, as if even when the sky and earth splits, there will still be no change in his expression.

Chapter 2

Open animosity

Jing Jun did not expect his opponent to immediately strike without even a greeting. But he has lived all his life in the forests and grew up among ferocious animals so he has met even more dangerous situations than this numerous times. He chortled, made a false move as if he's going to move diagonally to the left and when the long sword is about to reach him, he moved to the right by a few millimeters and dashed to Zhao Zhi's back towards the left, his speed even faster than a spirit.

Zhao Mu and Guo Zhong exchanged a look, and both could see the surprise in each other. With such a person helping Xiang Shaolong, it's akin to giving wings to a tiger. Therefore, that Wu Zhuo and Teng Yi must be formidable as well and they have no choice but to reevaluate Xiang Shaolong's ability.

Zhao Zhi was obviously not afraid, this sword stroke is purely to test Jing Jun's reflexes and now that she knows that her opponent is extremely nimble, she gave a soft grunt as she bent her legs and jumped up into the air, turning a huge somersault. The sharp weapon in her hand turned into a million sword sparks aiming towards Jing Jun from the air. Zhao Ba's men immediately cheered.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Zhao Zhi's swordplay looks nice and tightly executed as well, absolutely not just showy moves and was secretly startled as he can deduce from this that Zhao Ba will definitely be extremely formidable. At the

same time he remembered how Lian Jin called himself invincible in Handan; people with elevated status like Zhao Mu and Yan Ping will naturally not duel with Lian Jin but Zhao Ba as the head of the warrior association, why did he allow Lian Jin to have his way?

He had a sudden thought, as if he could grasp the meaning of it, but can't really accurately describe what he felt. Such a weird feeling is making him feel extremely uncomfortable. The empty handed Jing Jun who was standing in the middle of the hall finally took out his weapon, a dagger secured to his waist. His hand reached into his clothes and a ball of something blackish looking suddenly flew out from his hand, first aimed towards Zhao Zhi's right then it speeded up and turned back and hit Zhao Zhi's long sword with a 'dang!'.

Zhao Zhi's sword spears were immediately dispersed and she also dropped to the ground. That thing belonging to Jing Jun flew above his head, turning circles above following the movements of his right hand, it turned out to be a shiny, silvery crescent shaped 'Flying Knife', which is extremely sharp on both sides, especially the sharp ends that is shaped like a cow's horns, making one feel it's horrible danger. It's the first time Xiang Shaolong has seen his specialized weapon and secretly thought that it will take little effort if it's used to kill beasts.

Jing Jun grinned and looked at Zhao Zhi, who seemed at a loss as to how to deal with his weapon, his eyes staring leeringly at her chest. Zhao Ba raised his voice, "Such unorthodox weapons, how can it be even taken out in public." A loud laugh was heard from the main door and someone commented, "Chairman Zhao's words are not quite right! In the world there

are only weapons that can kill or cannot kill, there's no such thing as unorthodox."

Everyone turned around in surprise only to see the great general Li Mu step into through the door accompanied by 10 over family warriors. Gao Ang and a few Guo family guards were running after him, obviously they did not even have the chance to announce his arrival. Xiang Shaolong took the chance to call Jing Jun back. A flash of icy murderous intent flashed past Zhao Zhi's eyes before she quietly returned to her seat.

The wily old fox Guo Zhong chuckled as he left the host table, his face full of smiles as he said, "When did general come back, or else you would certainly not be left out tonight." Li Mu's dynamic eyes swept over all the guests who stood up to welcome him and when he saw Zhao Mu, a murderous intent flashed swiftly in his eyes before he covered it up and said with a cold smile, "I just hope that Mister Guo will not blame me for coming uninvited."

He stared at the embarrassed looking Zhao Ba and said, "Chairman is in charge of cultivating talents for great Zhao, but please do not be such a stickler for customs. I have been fighting with barbarians for a long time and am used to seeing the countless changes on the battlefield. When 2 armies fight, the only goal is to win the other party, who cares what weapon is being used." Zhao Ba was so furious his face turned dark but he was at a loss for words. Li Mu turned towards Xiang Shaolong and his tone softened as he said, "Shaolong has accomplished a great merit, I came today to offer you 3 toasts. Bring me wine!"

This famous Zhao general who is almost on par with Lian Po shocked the

entire gathering upon his arrival and even a bully like Zhao Mu dared not speak up and risk offending this number 2 person in the military. Words seem to be stuck in Le Cheng and Guo Kai's throats as they dared not reply as well. Xiang Shaolong was secretly surprised, he did not expect this person who represents the Zhao military would show his support for him publicly, and now he is no longer fighting alone.

Only Yan Ping remained seated, not showing any deference to Li Mu at all. Li Mu did not blame him at all and just drank 3 cups of wine with Xiang Shaolong, even seating himself down at Xiang Shaolong's table. Wu Zhuo and the rest immediately left their seats while Guo Zhong summoned his men to arrange for 3 extra tables behind for them and Li Mu's men.

After everyone was seated, Zhao Mu gave a dry cough and said, "Great general has just returned, I wonder how is the situation at the border?" Li Mu replied icily, "This is the first time the Marquis of Julu has asked about the Xiong Nus but the reason I rushed back to Handan this time is because of Lady Ni's incident. After discussing with Premier Lian, we felt that there are many suspicious points regarding her suicide and decided that the military will jointly send in an official request to his Majesty to look into this matter thoroughly. Marquis is the person who dealt with this case single handedly, so you will know that my words are not baseless. I still need to seek your advice."

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly enlightened. He remembered Zhao Qian once mentioned that Zhao Ni is the daughter-in-law of Zhao She, a famed general of Zhao who once defeated the Qin army. Because of her insistence of preserving her chastity she was well liked by the people and even has the

support of the military, that's why even Zhao Mu dared not touch her. Now that Zhao Mu's lust has gotten the better of him and caused her death, there's no way his relations with Zhao She, the military and the other generals can maintain cordiality and now they are going to fight each other face on. That's why Li Mu is being so open about his intention to deal with Zhao Mu now.

Zhao Mu's expression changed for the worse immediately but because of Li Mu's military powers and status, he dared not throw his temper. Guo Kai said condescendingly, "Lady Ni committed suicide because of her pining for her dead husband, this is a fact and his Majesty is most aware of this matter. General is not putting your energy at the borders, isn't all this unnecessary?"

Xiang Shaolong did not expect someone as subtle as Guo Kai would actually rebut Li Mu. Obviously the fight between the military and Zhao Mu's gang have reached a burning stage where each will not give any face to the opposite party. Li Mu is indeed a hardened soldier. He looked heavenward and laughed loudly, "We're exactly afraid his Majesty will be tricked by unscrupulous people, that's why we have no choice but to interfere. The way to winning is first to settle internal problems before dealing with external problems. If you say this is unnecessary, this must be a very extreme joke."

Guo Zhong has never joined in any faction's fight but the various groups will try to pull him towards their cause due to his influence, hence he was able to make friends with all sides. Now that he saw that the atmosphere is getting more and more fiery, he felt that things might be getting out of hand so he interrupted and tried to cool things down by saying, "We will not talk about state affairs tonight, but only talk about entertainment. I have arranged a

very exciting show of beauties dancing with swords, shall we all enjoy it?" He has not even given the signal when Yan Ping called out, "Hold it!"

Slowly standing up, he pulled out from his back the Juzi sword which is at least 1.5 times longer than the average sword and looked at Xiang Shaolong icily as he said, "Commander Xiang, tonight either you will perish or I will die. Let me see what that traitor Yuan Zong has taught you?" Because of Yan Ping's special status, there is no way Li Mu can find a reason to interrupt or interfere. Xiang Shaolong knows that this duel is unavoidable and thought to himself that he might as well let this duel be a form of offering for Yuan Zong. If not because that his has numbers on his side, there's no way Yan Ping can harm even a hair on that Mohist master! He stood up loudly, his eyes icy as he stared at Yan Ping and said, "Who is the traitor? You can debate about it when you see Mo Yi himself!"

Yan Ping snorted angrily, obviously he is feeling extremely furious as he moved to the middle of the hall and stood ready. The hall was silent, everyone knows Yan Ping's swordplay is unfathomable. Naturally some are secretly cheering while some were worried for Xiang Shaolong. Zhao Mu is secretly laughing, because if Yan Ping is killed, King Xiaocheng will still be extremely unhappy although he knows that Xiang Shaolong has no choice. If Yan Ping were to kill Xiang Shaolong and get rid of this thorn in his eye, it will be beneficial to him. So no matter what the outcome is, he has all to gain and nothing to lose.

Xiang Shaolong left his table and beyond everyone's expectations, he actually walked towards Zhao Mu's table instead, his eyes frosty as he stared at Zhao Mu unceasingly. Zhao Mu and his men were on the alert, some of them even

moving their hands to their sword handles, getting ready to deal with any moves that might be harm Zhao Mu. Xiang Shaolong came to the front of Zhao Mu's table and with a slight smile, removed the Flying Rainbow from his waist and placed it together with the scabbard on the table in front of Zhao Mu, saying calmly, "This sword will be returned to Marquis. It has once happily drunk the fresh blood of Xiao Weimou, it has not shamed the reason why Marquis generously gave it away." He then stared hard at this conniving thief who now has a blood feud with him before turning around and walking towards Yan Ping who was standing in the middle of the hall.

Although Xiao Weimou died because of him, the real person who killed Xiao Weimou is Teng Yi. The reason why Xiang Shaolong said that is to deliberately antagonize Zhao Mu and at the same time let him know that he is already aware of his nefarious plan. The act of returning the sword signifies that a clear line will henceforth be drawn between them, an open rebuke. At this instant, he doesn't even care about King Xiaocheng, much less Zhao Mu. And only when he publicly shows his animosity like this can he get the full support of Lian Po, Li Mu and the military.

Indeed Zhao Mu was so furious that his face turned red and pale, looking extremely horrible. As for the rest it is the first time they found out that Xiao Weimou has been killed and were all surprised and whispered amongst themselves. An expression of shock even flashed past Li Mu and Yan Ping's faces. Xiang Shaolong felt greatly relieved that he now no longer have to put on an act with his enemy Zhao Mu. His eyes staring at Yan Ping, he reached out and drew his Mohist wooden sword as waves of murderous aura emitted from him like steam. At the same time his mind was clear, everything is inconsequential, forgetting even about Yuan Zong's revenge. Only his Mohist

wooden sword and his opponent's Juzi sword is left in this world, with no place for anything else.

Although Yan Ping looks as stable as a mountain with no loopholes at all, it seems that Xiang Shaolong totally understands his enemy's movement and intent, which are totally reflected in his calm mind. This is the method of 'keeping one's heart as clear as jade' in Mo Yi's 3 killer strikes, which uses a extraordinary breathing method and a resolute mind. The open animosity with Zhao Mu has also made him calmer, like a reverend who has suddenly found the Way, he has now reached the epitome of the way of the sword. In other people's eyes, Xiang Shaolong seems to have suddenly changed into another person, as quiet as still water but also simmering within an explosive strength and murderous aura.

Zhao Mu and Zhao Ba revealed a look of shock at the same time. They're all expert swordsmen so they naturally know that the essence of swordplay can be most effectively executed when once reaches such a stage. Yan Ping's expression turned somber, he deeply understands Mohist swordplay's reason of emphasizing more on defense than attack so thinking that Xiang Shaolong will be young and rash, decided that he will not attack first. If not for the fact that Xiang Shaolong is revealing such a frightening aura, he will never control himself and give way like this.

Xiang Shaolong's gaze fell onto his opponent's Juzi sword. Under the firelight, it seems to radiate an indescribable shine and dust could not even settle on it. Obviously it's extremely sharp. He can't help but feel puzzled, isn't Mohist sword play's dexterity based on its cumbersome weight, but isn't this sharp and swift long sword just the opposite of the essence of Mohist swordplay?

Unless Yan Ping has some other skills, or else this type of sword can never fully execute the essence of Mohist swordplay. Once he thought of this, he has a plan in his mind and he lifted his wooden sword as he walked slowly but surely towards Yan Ping. Yan Ping's eyes were shooting daggers at him as he stared at Xiang Shaolong's shoulders.

The hall was so quiet one can hear a pin drop. Only the footsteps of Xiang Shaolong, which seems to be in total synchronization with the tempo of the universe, can be heard. Everyone suddenly has a strange feeling, as if everything is now in Xiang Shaolong's control and everything in the universe will have to bow down to him but little do they know that this is exactly the essence of the Mohist's 3 killer strikes.

Xiang Shaolong thought of the Zou Yan's observation tower in Daliang, remembered the beautiful scene of the sky filled with stars and an encompassing feeling of the universe flared up in him as he roared and executed the move of 'Attacking instead of defending' from the 3 killer strikes. The Mohist sword seems to extend yet retract, suddenly it seems to be moving weirdly in a fashion that encompasses the meaning of the mystical universe straight towards Yan Ping's face. Even for a person as calm as Yan Ping, he was startled as well. He only felt his opponent's sword styles are like the Changjiang River, never ending, and if he only uses Mohist swordplay's defense style, he'll immediately be beaten. What is even more shocking is that his opponent's styles seem to be made to go against the Mohist swordplay and yet they are undeniably Mohist swordplay as well. Left with no choice, the Juzi sword morphed into icy sparks as it meets the attack with an attack.

Xiang Shaolong's intent is to force him to execute his secret skills and now that he saw his trick has worked, he suddenly retreated and executed one of the moves 'Returning sword stance' from 'Defending instead of attacking'. Yan Ping was ecstatic, thinking that his opponent's elaborate swordplay is just a farce and he returned to the old method of Mohist swordplay. He invented this swordplay of his, and named it 'Breaking Mohism', used especially to deal with his enemies within the Mohist sect. That's why he's so confident of killing Xiang Shaolong so at this point in time he won't let such a splendid opportunity pass and hurriedly moved forward to attack, totally forgetting about his initial plan to use defense as the main strategy. Xiang Shaolong's mind is as clear as water and on seeing his opponent's sword sparks grow wider, but the aim is towards his right shoulder. However, that is the loophole he deliberately showed.

Defending instead of attacking is the first stance of Mohist swordplay's 3 killer moves and it encompasses 120 moves and each move has a loophole which are in fact intricately designed traps to lure the enemy in, which is exactly the essence of using defense instead of attacks. On seeing that Yan Ping has been tricked, he laughed loudly as he moved forward like lightning and Yan Ping's sword stabbed into empty air. Xiang Shaolong turned his waist slightly and his Mohist wooden sword turned back like lightning and struck heavily but surely on his opponent's sword.

He knows that Yan Ping's swordsmanship is excellent and extremely experienced as well, so he's definitely not worse off when compared. Even if he has the 3 killer strikes, he'd just learnt them after all and not totally adept at it so he is not insisting on injuring his enemy at all. However he took the opportunity and used his wooden sword which is at least 3 to 4 times heavier

than his opponent's sword in addition to his extraordinary arm strength to force his opponent to use his strength. Yan Ping was immediately greatly disadvantaged as he felt his right hand go numb and his Juzi sword almost slipped from his grasp. Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. Although Yan Ping looks as skinny as a pole on the surface, his arm strength is extraordinary and the rebounding force of the clash cause his right arm to go numb as well.

Yan Ping gave a quiet snort and moved away diagonally, executing the defense stance of Mohist swordplay, which is so tight, that even splashing water won't be able to get past him. Just as the onlookers were dumbfounded from what just happened, Xiang Shaolong moved his sword to his left hand and in a totally unexpected way, the wooden sword seemed like a swallow flying as it flew out in a curve and came back, sweeping Yan Ping's right shoulder. Yan Ping did not expect that his opponent can use the sword so well with his left hand as well and as his right hand have not recovered from the impact, he had no choice but to take another step back and face his enemy. The Juzi sword's execution was light and nimble as it tried to counterbalance his opponent's heavy handed sweeps.

Xiang Shaolong laughed loudly, "You've been tricked!" as he wooden sword rose to tangle with his opponent's precious sword. The 2 bodies joined then separated. On the surface it seems there's no injury to either of them but everyone can see that Yan Ping has been greatly disadvantaged and his face is now extremely pale. Xiang Shaolong took 3 steps forward towards Yan Ping. Yan Ping gritted his teeth and retreated in unison. At the same time they moved to the left in unison, as if there's an invisible thread joining the two of them together.

Yan Ping is indeed someone who has trained hard for many years and his expression quickly returned to normal, as if he is not injured at all. It turned out that earlier Xiang Shaolong had kneed Yan Ping on his lower calf and if not for the fact that his stance was steady and he immediately moved his strength down, he would have fallen to the ground. However the pain is still throbbing and he knows that he is not able to fight a long battle and he gave a low snort and the Juzi sword attacked towards his opponent, moving like a meteor. Xiang Shaolong fighting mood is at its peak as he counted Yan Ping's breathing and steps. Before his opponent struck, he can already predict accurately if it's a real or fake move by observing the slight change in his opponent's quickened breathing and lighter footsteps. He executed the most formidable move, 'Forgetting feelings' from the 3 killer strike's 'Attacking and defending concurrently', throwing himself at death's door, using only the earlier advantage he gained to compete with his opponent on their innate ability and gut reactions.

There was a cry as Yan Ping's sword dropped to the ground and he hurriedly retreated, the expression on his face as pale as a dead person. His left hand clasping his right arm as fresh blood oozed from between his fingers. Although this slash did not take his life, Yan Ping will not be able to fight for the time being and it's still an unknown whether his right hand will be crippled. Immediately some people rushed out with the intention of helping to hold this proud man.

Yan Ping stood up straight and shouted at those who came forward to go away. He stared at Xiang Shaolong and asked, "Why did you hold yourself back?" Xiang Shaolong put his sword back into the sheath on his back and said calmly, "Although Yuan Zong died because of you, but it's after all the

internal fight of your Mohist sect and has nothing to do with me, so is there a need to fight to the death?"

Yan Ping asked quietly, "What swordplay were you using earlier?" Xiang Shaolong replied calmly, "It's a swordplay I created myself, what does Juzi think of it?" A deep hatred flashed from Yan Ping's eyes as he shouted, "Good!" and he walked towards the main door without even turning back, not even bothering to take his sword with him.

Chapter 3

Mother of Emperor Qin

After Yan Ping left quietly after his defeat, Xiang Shaolong took the opportunity to take his leave.

Li Mu happily gave him a lift and his men gave up 3 horses for Teng Yi and the rest while Xiang Shaolong was invited up the carriage with him.

The entourage rode slowly down the hill of the Guo residence.

Li Mu was silent for a moment before he bared himself, "This time we can tolerate it no longer and decided to throw in the hatchet, using Lady Ni's incident to have a last confrontation with Zhao Mu." He put his hand on Xiang Shaolong's shoulder and said seriously, "The Premier and I have been keeping a close watch on you. Shaolong you are our Great Zhao's a rare talent of this generation, and you're still so young." He sighed before continuing, "If his Majesty still wants to protect Zhao Mu this time, Shaolong should leave Zhao immediately and go somewhere else to find your fame. Don't be like us and stay on blindly to protect a country with no hope."

Xiang Shaolong was surprised, "We've gotten the secret manual, why are you still so pessimistic. I think the people of Great Zhao are slowly getting prosperous and in another few years we'll regain our lost strength!"

Li Mu interrupted him, "Shaolong you're still not very familiar with affairs of

the state. Even without the battle of Changping which greatly weakened us, we still have our disadvantages. They are they Xiong Nus who kept encroaching on our borders, and in order to deal with them, our resources will be depleted in the long run. That's why among the various states, only Great Zhao has the least population. Although we have many famous generals, but ever since the beginning of the empire, we can only defend our soil and does not have the ability to expand."

Xiang Shaolong sincerely felt a liking for this famous general who is on par with Lian Po and can't help but ask, "Since you can see this point so clearly, why are you still in Zhao and not leaving?"

Li Mu looked out the window, a look of extreme sadness flashed in his eyes as he sighed quietly and said, "Man is not without feelings, unlike plants and trees. I have been defending the northern border for so long, fighting the Xiong Nus, and have established a deep relationship with those living at the borders. If I abandon them and leave, who else can stop the vicious and merciless Xiong Nus, how can I bear to let them be murdered. Hai!"

There was helplessness in his words.

Xiang Shaolong was moved and asked, "Can you delay the submission of your document to his Majesty for 1 to 2 days."

A light flashed past Li Mu's eyes as he stared at him and asked, "You seem to be confident, what ingenious move do you have?"

Xiang Shaolong respects him from the bottom of his heart so without hiding a

single thing, told him about the possibility that Zhao Mu is a spy sent by the Chus to create havoc.

Li Mu grabbed his shoulders tightly, a ray of hope shot from his eyes as he said, “Shaolong you’re really something. We’ll use this point, which has never been thought of to deal with Zhao Mu. I’ll be staying in Handan for a few days, we’ll keep in close contact and coordinate the timing to submit the document.”

The 2 of them discussed a little more and soon they arrived at the Wu family stockade. Before he left the carriage, Li Mu held him back and said, “Shaolong you’re still young and full of vigor and may find it difficult to resist temptations. You may know that wine and women can harm a person, even an iron man will not be able to withstand days and nights of merry making. Shaolong you must remember that.”

Xiang Shaolong knows that his flirtatious escapades, especially his affair with Lady Ya, have spread far. That’s why Li Mu had such an advice for him. He blushed and lowered his head to accept the lecture.

He had just stepped into the Wu residence when the guards immediately called him and Wu Zhuo to meet with Wu Yingyuan while Teng and Jing both returned to the back courtyard to rest.

Wu Yingyuan was accompanied by Tao Fang and received them in the secret room in his inner chamber. After listening to the report on this recent trip, he praised them before saying, “Tu Xian just sent someone to contact me, saying that Lu Buwei’s situation now is not too good. His enemies in the Qin

court is using the reason that he's not a Qin to carry rumors to King Zhuangxiang and wants him to be excluded. King Zhuangxiang is someone who is easily swayed and he may be convinced by them. Therefore the matter of moving Ying Zheng and his mother back to Xianyang cannot be delayed further. With she and her son next to King Zhuangxiang, Lu Buwei's status will be as stable as a mountain and he may even become the premier. Otherwise even our hopes will be dashed."

Xiang Shaolong was still moved by what Li Mu had said so he furrowed his brows, "Can we delay it for a few days, and see if there's hope to topple Zhao Mu first?"

Wu Yingyuan looked at him with concentration, "I know you can't wait to tear Zhao Mu to pieces, but this is after all a personal feud. You should take into account the bigger picture. Now the fate of the Wu family is on your shoulders, one mistake and everyone will perish."

Xiang Shaolong sighed quietly, "If Zhao Mu is toppled, is there still hope for Great Zhao?"

Wu Yingyuan was irritated and interrupted him, "That's just wishful thinking. Even if Zhao Mu is killed, with such a muddleheaded ruler like King Xiaocheng, the Zhao family will still be destined to die. The Crown Prince is nothing good as well. The only way out for the Wu family is to rely on Qin, that is the only hope."

Xiang Shaolong lowered his head speechlessly, and knows that after his conversation with Li Mu, he has been greatly moved by his great sacrifice.

Only Wu Yingyuan, this 100% businessman is more formidable. He doesn't talk about feelings, only about actual benefits, because history has long proven that what he said is indeed correct.

Wu Yingyuan dotes greatly on this son-in-law in his heart and knows that his words have been a little too stern, so his voice turned more gentle as he said, "I know that Shaolong is smarter than others, I wonder if you have any headway regarding the matter of sending Ying Zheng and his mother back?"

Xiang Shaolong braced himself up and said, "It's still too early now. After I rest for a while, I will look for Zhuji. Only if she can be convinced will the matter be able to succeed."

Wu Yingyuan and the rest were stunned.

It's already the 'Mou'* hour and he still said it's too early?

(*Mou – Time between 7pm to 9pm)

Does he want to wait until the middle of the night to sneak into Zhuji's bedchamber?

Xiang Shaolong soaked himself in the pool, his mind in a dilemma.

He is someone who places great emphasis on relationships. The first place he came to after traveling in the time machine is the state of Zhao and after spending these time with the Zhaos, and after how he and the Zhao army relied on each other when they went to Wei, he's already established close

relations with them. Subconsciously he has regarded Zhao as his own country and hope to do something for her.

But he knows that even if he gets rid of Zhao Mu, the state of Zhao won't be any better. Such a torn feeling made him even more dejected.

Ting Fangshi who is next to him asked gently, "What is Shaolong thinking about?"

Wu Tingfang who is on the other side said with a little jealousy, "Of course he's thinking of Sister Ya and Princess Qian!"

Xiang Shaolong hugged the 2 naked beauties and remembered Li Mu's warning about not indulging in wine and women so he said with a bitter smile, "With you two beauties next to me, how can I think of other women. It's because I have a matter to attend to tonight and cannot accompany you, that's why I was feeling troubled."

Wu Tingfang said understandingly, "Master Tao has informed us, Xiang Lang just put your mind at ease and go. We will wait for your return obediently. Ai! I forgot to tell you, ever since you went to Daliang, Sister Ting has been sleeping with me every night, talking about our secrets. Tonight us sisters will wait for you on the bed."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought, "Oh heavens!", if they want intimacy everytime, it'll be very difficult even if he wants to avoid wine and women.

Wu Tingfang continued excitedly, "I did not expect even Yan Ping is not your

match and I really hope you can put that Zhao Ba down a peg or two as well.”

Xiang Shaolong thought of Zhao Zhi and can't help but ask about her.

Wu Tingfang lowered her head with embarrassment as she replied, “I heard she's one of the lovers of that baddie Lian Jin. You killed Lian Jin so naturally she'll hate you to the core.”

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly enlightened.

The reason why Zhao Ba is so full of hatred for him may be related to this, and not because he is in cahoots with Zhao Mu. But of course there may be other reasons as well.

Whether in this era or the 21st century, whoever have power will certainly have other people who will side him, this is a fact that will never change with time.

Xiang Shaolong saw that time is almost up and told Chunying who was adding hot water into the pool, “Help me get Masters Teng Yi and Jing Jun here.”

The snow fell relentlessly on the ancient city of Handan.

Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi hid themselves in a dark corner, looking at the huge house with lanterns still lighted in it.

Xiang Shaolong whispered in Teng Yi's ears with a smile, “That rascal Jing Jun must be secretly cursing now because I dragged him out from a warm bed

with a woman in it.”

Teng Yi gave a cold snort, “Dare he? I’ve warned him, if he starts going overboard, I’ll send him packing back home.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that with Teng Yi controlling Jing Jun, it’ll not be easy for this lad to go overboard.

The wind howled and Jing Jun who is 10 times more nimble than the average person jumped down from the wall and came quickly to where they were hiding. He said quietly, “I didn’t expect the inside to be so huge! I’ve found out where Zhuji lives.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head, “Let us go then!”

The 3 of them dashed out from the dark place and came to the bottom of the high wall.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the snowing sky and thought that a dark and windy night like this is perfect for espionage. Everyone would be snuggling in their blankets in such cold weather and even the guards will be hiding in the rooms lighted with stoves.

In this quiet and lonely night, they seem to be in another unique world. Especially when Xiang Shaolong is thinking that he can see the beauty who gave birth to the first Emperor of China, he felt both excited and exhilarating.

Xiang Shaolong savored this strange feeling carefully as he followed Jing Jun

and climbed over the wall swiftly, landing within the courtyard.

Inside the houses all joined one another, making it difficult for one to see everything at once. What is unexpected is that with Ying Zheng's status as a hostage, why is he able to use such a big place.

They landed in a rectangular opened air courtyard and facing the high wall is a row of houses, which looks like the residences of servants.

Jing Jun executed his skills and led the way in front with familiarity. They passed by numerous houses, came to a garden forest with a pond, a fake hill and pavilion.

Jing Jun pointed at a 2 storey building on the other side of the garden forest, which still has lamps burning in it and said, "I overheard the maids talking earlier, Zhuji should be staying there but I don't know which room?"

Teng Yi scrutinized the surroundings and said, "We'll keep a look out here for you, if the situation is not right, Jing Jun will give out a bird call to inform you."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in agreement and snuck towards the building. He chose a window with no lights and after checking that nothing is amiss, dashed inside.

This place looks like a small hall.

He quickly walked to the wooden door leading out and plastered his ear on it.

On hearing that there's no one outside, he pushed the door open and went out.

Outside is a corridor with one end leading to the outer hall and the other end to a flight of stairs leading upstairs.

The house was quiet, it seems that the maids are already in dreamland.

He had not finish this thought when he heard footsteps from the top of the stairs.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly hid back into the room and wondered why someone is still awake at a time like this.

The footsteps stopped in front of the door.

Xiang Shaolong was astounded, there's not enough time for him to leave by the window and he hurriedly went to a corner and squat down behind a small cabinet. Although it's not a good place to hide, it's better to come face to face with the person coming in.

Indeed someone pushed the door and entered, followed by the sounds of cups and plates knocking on one another.

Xiang Shaolong knows that the other party has no idea that someone is hiding in a corner so he boldly extended his head out for a look. It turned out to be 2 pretty maids.

One of the maids yawned and said, “He’s the worst, every time he comes Madam would not be able to sleep, and we’ll have to serve them at the side.”

The other maid said, “Madam is usually a person of few words but when she sees him she seems to have endless things to say.”

The maid who spoke first laughed, “It’s better than serving that lecher. His body can’t make it yet he wants to rely on hateful toys. Sister Xiang has only half a life left after being toyed with him for 3 nights in a row. Hai!”

Xiang Shaolong’s heart dropped, needless to say this lecher must be Ying Zheng. Now that the maids are talking about it, it seems that Lady Ya’s words are not wrong at all.

What is this all about? How can the heroic and smart Emperor Qin be someone like that, how is he going to exterminate Lu Buwei in future and consolidate the 6 states, building the largest foundation for China.

Amongst the chatter, the 2 maids prepared the tea and left.

Now that he knows that someone is still awake, Xiang Shaolong dare not go upstairs via the stairs so he left by the window and saw that there is a darkened window on the second floor. He was climbing halfway up when a group of patrol came with lanterns from the small path in the garden. Xiang Shaolong was startled, because if this is where Zhuji stays, the guards will certainly be extra alert and will not miss this person hanging in midair.

He gritted his teeth and increased his speed, in a moment he went through

the window into the room.

It's a large bedroom for a lady, the floor was piled with thick and soft rugs while the bed is empty. Besides a few tables and mirrors, on the walls pretty paintings were hung. Xiang Shaolong was suspecting if this is Zhuji's bedroom when the familiar footsteps of the 2 maids sounded outside the door again.

Xiang Shaolong secretly lamented.

This is what they say, 'a wolf in front and a tiger below'. Luckily there is a large wardrobe at the corner of the room and left with no choice, he ran over and opened it for a look. There are 2 compartments inside, although there are clothes piled on the lowest compartment, but he can still squeeze in, if barely. He dare not hesitate any longer and immediately squeezed in and just as he closed the wardrobe door, the 2 maids pushed open then door and came in.

Followed by sounds of them arranging the blankets.

After a moment the 2 maids walked out but they did not close the door.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting, it seems that Zhuji and her lover will come in anytime, then won't he have to suffer in here and listen to Zhuji's moans.

Tonight seems to be a difficult time to get in touch with Zhuji. Spending the night under the blankets with Wu Tingfang and Ting Fangshi is naturally a hundred times better than being curled up in here.

Besides if Teng and Jing sees that he has not come out after so long, something may happen.

Just as he was feeling troubled, footsteps, one heavy and one light, could be heard coming closer, followed by the sound of the door closing.

Xiang Shaolong secretly cried out, 'Heavens!' and he closed his eyes and left everything to fate.

Outside he could hear the friction of the clothes moving, and the moaning made by a man and woman.

Since Xiang Shaolong was feeling bored, he started guessing who Zhuji's lover might be.

Reasonably it definitely cannot be Zhao Mu, since he knows that the military will soon be going to King Xiaocheng tomorrow to settle scores with him, so now he should be going to the King of Zhao and trying to poison his mind. Because after all, the King of Zhao does have some feelings for Zhao Ni and if he really finds out that the person who caused her demise is Zhao Mu, he may ignore all 'marital' feelings and order Zhao Mu's death. So there's no way Zhao Mu will take this flippantly.

But Zhuji and her son has always been under Zhao Mu's supervision, and anyone else who wants to go near will need his permission.

Who can this person be then?

An extremely gentle voice can be heard from outside the wardrobe, “The thing that I asked of you, how is it now?”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly complimenting her. Just by listening to her voice, he knows that this woman is very well versed in using her gift of beauty to ensnarl men. No wonder the newly crowned King Zhuangxiang could not forget about her.

Since Lu Buwei chose her to captivate King Zhuangxiang, naturally she is someone extraordinary.

That lover replied, “Now the situation is uncertain, it’s still not the time to return to Qin.”

Xiang Shaolong was shocked and he immediately recognized him as the effeminate philosopher Guo Kai.

He did not expect it to be him. No wonder he linked up with Zhuji, just that he wonders if Zhao Mu is aware of this matter.

Zhuji pouted, “What’s so uncertain. Now that my husband has ascended the throne, as long as my son and I can return to Xianyang, Zheng’er will be the crown prince to ascend the throne. What’s there to worry about!”

Sounds of kissing was heard again and Zhuji’s moans became more intense. Obviously Guo Kai is trying all his means to pacify Zhuji.

Zhuji exclaimed breathlessly, “Don’t!”

Guo Kai replied, "Every second of the night is worth a thousand gold, it's rare for us to have this chance. Come! Let's talk further within the bed!"

Zhuji replied a little angrily, "You're only interested in my body but not at all concerned about my troubles. Tell me! Why didn't you do what you promised me."

Guo Kai replied anxiously, "Don't you know that I've put a lot of work into it? It's just that King Zhuangxiang has just ascended the throne and all parties are now keeping a close eye on both of you. Besides, Lu Buwei's status is not that stable now as well and he's in danger of being overthrown at any moment. No matter how we see it, you should not be sneaking back into Xianyang at this moment."

Xiang Shaolong gradually understood, the reason Zhuji ensnarled this important person in Zhao Mu's gang is because she wants to make use of his power to escape Handan.

It's just that one wonders if Guo Kai is really planning to betray Zhao Mu or he just wants to cheat her of her body, and it seems more likely that it's the latter. One just have to think that Guo Kai now has power in his hands and he has a large extended family in Zhao, so no matter how selfish he is, once he is faced with a life and death decision, he'll certainly think of his own parents, brothers, wife and children first.

The most embarrassing thing is if Guo Kai were to go to Qin, he will certainly lose his life and Zhuji. Because Zhuji's 2 other men, regardless of whether it's Lu Buwei or King Zhangxiang, will certainly kill him because of jealousy.

For someone as smart as Guo Kai, how can he not consider about something so important?

Of course Zhuji understands this reasoning as well, but she's just too anxious to return to Qin and become the Empress so she couldn't care about anything else.

Indeed Zhuji remained silent.

Guo Kai said gently, "Come! The weather is so cold! What can be a more comfortable place than beneath a blanket?"

Sounds of clothes being removed followed.

Zhuji's voice said, "You get onto the bed first, I'll join you shortly after undressing."

Guo Kai is obviously very tired and he yawned and went up the bed.

Outside sounds of Zhuji removing her robes and accessories were heard.

A strange noise was heard, it turned out to be Guo Kai snoring.

Xiang Shaolong was affected as well and felt his eyelids getting heavy. Just as he was falling asleep. Footsteps came nearer.

Any drowsiness was immediately dissipated, and he secretly thought that it can't be that much of a coincidence that Zhuji is actually coming to the

wardrobe to take her sexy lingerie.

He has not finished his thought when the wardrobe door was pulled open.

Xiang Shaolong had an idea out of impulse and jumped up, hugging her and throwing her down to the ground with one hand covering her tiny mouth, pressing her voluptuous and scantily clad alluring body beneath his. At the same time, he whispered close to her ear, “I am Xiang Shaolong, here to look for you on Lu Buwei’s orders!”

He repeated it 3 times before Zhuji stopped her struggle and her delicate body softened.

On the bed, the rhythmic snoring of Guo Kai was heard.

Xiang Shaolong thanked heavens and raised himself up a little, and came face to face with Zhuji.

He can’t help but feel his heart beat faster.

He saw the lady under him was extremely enticing, filled with the allure of a mature woman with eyes that could speak volumes, which are now sizing Xiang Shaolong up.

Suddenly Xiang Shaolong could feel her whole alluring body and a wave of lust coursed through him. He was so startled he hurriedly suppressed his lust in case the other party feels it.

He slowly removed his large hand that was covering her mouth and immediately saw Zhuji's pretty face.

She's certainly not a perfect and delicate beauty like Wu Tingfang, Lady Ya or Ji Yanran. Her face is a little too long, the bridge of her nose a little crooked and her lips a little too thick, but when matched with her pretty eyes, it formed a wild beauty and allure that can take one's soul away. Especially her lips which seems to be full of character, the corner lightly curved up, making men think that it's not an easy task to subdue her.

Heavens!

This is Emperor Qin's birth mother!

He has been looking for Emperor Qin all this time but never in his dreams did he think that he could take advantage of his mother like this.

Her body fragrance drifted into his nose.

Zhuji looked at him unblinkingly and said quietly, "I know who you are, because the person Zhao Mu most want to get rid of now is you."

Xiang Shaolong recollected his wandering thoughts and went close to her ear and said, "I hope you also know the relationship between the Wu family and Mister Lu. He sent Tu Xian to make contact with us to get you and your son back to Xianyang as soon as possible."

Xiang Shaolong tried to bear with the itch he felt in his ear and suppressed

the urge to take advantage of her, but he can't help but lightly bite on her rounded earlobe and said, "Firstly I have to make contact with you to understand the situation before we can settle the details of escape. I..."

The sound of someone turning was heard on the bed.

The both of them were startled.

Zhuji said hurriedly, "Come again tomorrow night! I'll wait for you."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly rolled aside.

Zhuji stood up nimbly and at this time Guo Kai called for her from the bed.

Zhuji blushed slightly as she lowered her head and stared at Xiang Shaolong for a moment.

Xiang Shaolong can't help but feel lust welling up as he reached out and grabbed her calf, pinched it before letting go.

That captivating feeling is even more touching than the actual act of copulation.

Zhuji rolled her eyes at him before walking towards the bed.

Only after she extinguished the lamp and went into the bed curtains did Xiang Shaolong regain his thoughts.

He secretly thought that this woman is indeed formidable before leaving hurriedly.

By this time even if he made any noise, Guo Kai would not find out.

Chapter 4

No route for advance or retreat

After breakfast, Xiang Shaolong went to see Master Wu and his son but he did not see Wu Zhuo and Tao Fang.

He remembered the suspicious Chu who was in contact with Zhao Mu and knows that those two must be away because of this matter.

When he reported the situation last night when he saw Zhuji, Master Wu and his son turned somber.

Wu Yingyuan furrowed his brows and said, "This woman is extremely formidable, no man can escape her allure. But why is Guo Kai so bold, the servants there should all belong to Zhao Mu, so how can he hide his visits from Zhao Mu?"

Master Wu replied, "Zhao Mu allowed Guo Kai to handle a lot of matters for him, for all you know those people there are all placed by Guo Kai. That's why he can steal what he's supposed to protect without any fear at all."

He turned towards Xiang Shaolong and said, "The 2 new family warriors you recruited are rare talents. Treat them well, wealth and women, just give it to them."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I understand!" but he secretly thought to himself

that a relationship based on such material goods, how can it sustain?

Wu Yingyuan replied, “It seems that Shaolong can easily smuggle them out now, the question is how to leave Handan and avoid the pursuing soldiers along the way?” He paused and asked suspiciously, “Isn’t this a little too easy!”

Xiang Shaolong was only worried about the other aspect, “Our Wu family has such an extended family, easily more than a thousand, how can we escape out of Zhao?”

Wu Yingyuan smiled, “I’ve arranged for this since 2 years ago. The Wu family has business all over the world, so all along there’s always been people who were sent to other areas to take care of business and the farms. Recently, with the excuse of setting up a new farm, even Tingwei has been sent out, in case he lets slip of our plans when he’s out merrymaking.

Xiang Shaolong was suddenly enlightened, no wonder he have not seen Wu Tingwei. He asked, “Since the King of Zhao is aware of father-in-law and Lu Buwei’s being in correspondence, and now that we keep sending our family people out of Handan, how can he not be suspicious?”

Wu Yingyuan replied, “They can only suspect! They have never gathered any concrete proof. Besides, both the Guo family and us have connections with the various powerful people in other states and sometimes we even helped the King of Zhao in overseas secret missions. If not for Zhao Mu fanning the flames at the side, what’s the big deal about having relations with Lu Buwei?”

Xiang Shaolong is even more perplexed, “Why is Zhao Mu so intent on getting rid of the Wu family?”

Master Wu slapped on the table and exclaimed angrily, “It’s all because of that fellow Guo Zhong who caused all these. I don’t know how he managed to find out that one of our family ancestors is a Qin, and investigated that the family name Wu is a major family name over at the Qin side, that’s why the King of Zhao’s suspicions of us grew day by day. Zhao Mu is just following the King of Zhao’s wishes and taking the opportunity to trample us!”

Only now did Xiang Shaolong manage to find out what happened.

Wu Yingyuan returned to the earlier topic, “Since Guo Kai has secretly entangled himself with Zhuji, we have to think of a way to make use of this matter to affect the relationship between Guo Kai and Zhao Mu. Without Guo Kai around to give nasty ideas to Zhao Mu, it’ll be easier to handle Zhao Mu.”

The corners of Master Wu’s lips revealed a slight mysterious smile as he said, “We’ll talk about this later.” He turned towards Xiang Shaolong and said, “You better think of a more concrete plan so that you can strengthen Zhuji’s confidence when you see her tonight, then it’ll be easier to cooperate in future.”

At this time a servant came to report that there’s a guest looking for Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling perplexed, who could be looking for him?

By now Xiang Shaolong's status in the Wu family is even greater than before, and is obviously the most important person after Master Wu and Wu Yingyuan, so he received the guest in the main hall of the main mansion.

He went to the hall, and his visitors turned out to be the old family warriors of Prince Shaoyuan, Liu Cao and Pu Bu.

Xiang Shaolong came forward joyfully and helped the 2 of them up, asking with a mixture of surprise and joy, "I've been waiting for you to arrive everyday, and finally my wait is over."

The 2 of them saw how Xiang Shaolong holds them in such high regard and were so grateful that hot tears welled in their eyes.

Xiang Shaolong asked about the situation in Daliang.

It turns out that ever since Xiang Shaolong escaped out of Prince Xinling's residence, Prince Xinling has been livid. After he found out that besides the front section of the 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual', the rest has been swapped and stolen, he was so upset he almost committed suicide. He even suspected his sister Lady Pingyuan had leaked the news to Xiang Shaolong and started behaving coldly towards her and her son.

Because of this Prince Shaoyuan became very bad tempered and kept on scolding and beating his family warriors. Pu Bu and the rest took the opportunity to resign.

Without the support of Prince Xinling, Prince Shaoyuan faces the difficulty of

supporting 200 odd family warriors so he might as well dismiss them. Therefore Pu Bu and 40 odd other men returned to Handan.

They are familiar with the surroundings here and after finding out that Xiang Shaolong is safe, came to find him immediately.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly has an idea and after summoning someone to borrow from Wu Yingyuan a large sum of money, he stuffed the money to the 2 of them and said, "Find a place to settle down but you must remember not to reveal your relations with me. Have fun and make merry all you can, when I need your help, I will look for you."

The 2 of them knew that he is now in a life and death fight with Zhao Mu and on hearing what he said, understood his meaning. They also saw that he is 10 times more generous than Prince Shaoyuan but his character is a 100 times better, so obviously they will want to follow him loyally.

Liu Cao said, "We're very popular in Handan, and now that we've officially left the Pingyuan Residence, why don't we pretend to throw in our lots with Zhao Mu's devious faction so we can become your eyes and ears."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this is indeed a good idea, who would have thought that the family warriors of Pingyuan Residence who used to be his enemies would now belong to him. They discussed who they should align themselves with and decided on how to make contact before the 2 of them left happily.

Xiang Shaolong felt more relieved and went to look for Teng Yi. Seeing that

he was training the warriors of the Wu family, he thought of the idea of the special task force and told him, "See if my suggestion is doable, among these 2000 warriors, choose about 100 of the best and name them 'Superior Troops'. Bring them to the farm and train them separately, let them learn the various different skills. If every one of them has half the skills of you and Jing Jun, it won't be an impossible task when the time comes to force our way into the hostage residence to save people."

At first Teng Yi furrowed his brows deeply when he heard that, secretly thinking how can a hundred people accomplish anything great, until Xiang Shaolong explained the method of keeping the strong and eliminating the weak as well as the strict training he underwent while in the special task force. This extremely experienced and ferocious warrior had to admit defeat and say, "This is the first time I've heard of such training methods, Shaolong you're absolutely an incomparable military genius. War in your hands has become a form of art."

Xiang Shaolong secretly laughed, if he can change the sabers, swords and arrows into guns and cannons, just this ancient special task force will be able to conquer the 6 states and unify the world. By then would he need to fear a mere Zhao Mu.

The 2 of them discussed in detail the methods of training and equipment needed before Xiang Shaolong led Jing Jun and that 10 personal bodyguards towards Lady Ya's residence.

While riding on the road, Xiang Shaolong thought of the missing Mei Canniang and had the urge to immediately turn his horse around and go to

Mulberry Village to take a look for himself.

He then remembered Ji Yanran at faraway Daliang, and for a moment was helplessly filled with sadness.

Jing Jun who was riding alongside him was looking at his surroundings and looking at the pedestrians on the streets, he suddenly said earnestly, "Xiao Jun is very grateful towards Brother Xiang and Brother Teng. Without both of you who brought me to such an exciting and fun place, I don't know how I am going to spend my life?"

Xiang Shaolong cast aside his troubles and said with a laugh, "But it may also cause you to lose your life!"

Jing Jun grinned and said suavely, "Then I can only accept my fate! Precisely because of this danger that I may lose my life anytime, it makes fun time with beauties all the more interesting. That feeling is just like when I was 5 years old and the first time I helped my father hunt tigers."

Xiang Shaolong asked hoarsely, "A 5 year old kid can't even walk steadily, what help can you render?"

Jing Jun laughed as well, "That I forgot, I only remember when the ferocious tiger fell into the trap, the horrible roars were so frightening that I peed in my pants."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but chortle loudly, his sadness momentarily forgotten.

Behind them hoof beats were heard.

Everyone turned their heads back in unison on hearing it.

A horse came nearer, the rider's cloak covering the whole head and for a moment they can't see the face clearly. Only when it got near did they recognize the person.

Jing Jun's eyes brightened immediately.

Xiang Shaolong was slightly surprised as he called out, "Where is Miss Zhi going?"

Zhao Zhi slowed her horse down and went to Xiang Shaolong's other side, turned her face towards him and looked at him frostily, "Where is Commander going then?"

Jing Jun who was on the other side blinked at her and said, "Miss Zhi have yet to reply Brother Xiang's question?"

Zhao Zhi felt angry upon seeing Jing Jun, feeling that he's more irritating than anyone else and retorted with fury, "When adults are talking, it's not your place to interrupt!"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Miss is wrong, Xiao Jun is my good brother, his words are my words."

Jing Jun did not expect Xiang Shaolong to think so highly of him and he

immediately became proud, puffing up his chest and deliberately heaved a sigh of pity as he said, “And I thought Miss Zhi is here to look for me!”

Zhao Zhi was so furious that her pretty face turned pale, “Who wants to look for you?”

Without knowing why, Jing Jun’s words and actions always irritated and anger her.

Jing Jun chuckled, “Who are you looking for then?”

Xiang Shaolong can’t help but feel that this lad is indeed quite good at making fun and flirting with women.

Zhao Zhi knows that she has fallen into Jing Jun’s questioning trap. If she answers that she’s here to look for Xiang Shaolong, it will mean that Jing Jun’s earlier insinuation that she has taken a liking for Xiang Shaolong and is therefore here to look for him. But if her answer is no, naturally she’s here to look for Jing Jun.

But the truth is Zhao Zhi doesn’t even know herself why she is here to look for Xiang Shaolong.

Last night Xiang Shaolong had an outstanding victory over Yan Ping, who is a highly respected martial arts master in Handan, shocking everyone present.

Zhao Ba who has always thought highly of himself is now feeling afraid, especially since the military is now backing Xiang Shaolong up, Zhao Ba will

not dare to embroil himself in the fight between the 2 big political and military powers. After the feast he immediately warned all his disciples, especially Zhao Zhi, not to antagonize Xiang Shaolong.

But Zhao Zhi is a proud person and after she went home, the more she thought about it, the more upset she became. After she woke up, she unconsciously went up her horse and came riding to the Wu residence and on the way there actually bumped into Xiang Shaolong, that's why she caught up with them.

Right now she is dumbfounded and her pretty face blushed.

Xiang Shaolong does not know the degree of closeness she has with Lian Jin, so he said with a quiet sigh, "At that time, being in a situation that one is forced to determine life and death in a duel, it's either Lian Jin will perish or I will die. Besides Lian Jin and Zhao Mu used underhanded tricks first while my fight with him was aboveboard, so who can blame me?"

Zhao Zhi was stunned, and lowered her pretty face.

The matter regarding Lian Jin and Zhao Mu using aphrodisiac to weaken Xiang Shaolong's energy has spread through the powerful in the imperial court long ago. Although Zhao Zhi has heard something about this, she forced herself to ignore it. But without knowing why, the way that Xiang Shaolong just talked about it like a passing matter, made her truly believe what has happened. Or maybe it's because last night Xiang Shaolong's conduct has shown that he is not one who is afraid of the powerful and that he is aboveboard in his attitude!

Her love for Lian Jin may be strong, but it's all superficial attraction to the opposite sex. Lian Jin had made use of her young blossoming heart and took the opportunity to steal her heart.

Such first love may be unforgettable for her, but it has not reached the stage where it has eaten into her soul. When Lian Jin's perfect image was destroyed, this love dissipated with the wind as well and for a moment her mind was in a blank, and she did not know what to do.

Xiang Shaolong seems to understand the change in her perfectly and asked with a smile, "Miss Zhi, will you let Jing Jun send you home?"

Zhao Zhi was startled, "I don't need anyone's escort!" She slapped her horse and went galloping into the side street on the left.

Xiang Shaolong gave Jing Jun an eye signal and Jing Jun was overjoyed as he slapped his own horse and went after her, ignoring the looks of others as he shouted, "Miss Zhi, wait for me!"

Xiang Shaolong was delighted.

That lass Zhao Zhi is really not too bad, and extremely compatible with Jing Jun both in terms of age and appearance. Most importantly he could tell that Jing Jun has fallen for her at first sight but it seems that if he wants to woo her successfully, he'll have to put in a lot of effort.

Suddenly Xiang Shaolong realized that he has changed a lot.

If it was in the past, women to him are the more the merrier and he will never reject any who approaches him. Maybe now he has too many beauties, or maybe the pain of having the women he love die horribly one after another has made his attitude towards women a lot more cooler and he doesn't really feel like stepping into the love arena now.

Everyone who is born will have to face the deaths of people around him, and the end will come with his own death.

For the past year, he has experienced the heart wrenching pain of such deaths.

He thought of what happened with Zhuji last night. At that time although he felt great lust, it has nothing to do with love or feelings at all, just the rash desire of pure basic attraction to the opposite sex.

But it's so difficult to control.

He'll have to be careful when he sees her tonight, or else if he were to have a physical relationship with her, things will become even more complicated.

He only hopes that she will not flirt with him, this woman truly understands how to lure men.

Lady Ya's residence came into view and Xiang Shaolong sighed before riding in.

The guards hastened their horses to follow him closely and 11 steeds swept

into Lady Ya's residence like the wind.

Lady Ya has gone to the Palace and only Zhao Qian and Master Pan is in the residence.

Zhao Pan has matured in a short time, unlike in the past where he will slip out and have fun the whole day or make fun of the maids or forming up gangs to create trouble.

Zhao Qian pitied him because of the horrific experience he went through and accompanied him in his studies. As for Zhao Pan, in front of his beautiful cousin, changed his character and studied hard as well.

Xiang Shaolong's heart ached on seeing this and he took Zhao Pan to the garden where he conscientiously taught him the Mohist swordplay and ordered his men to spar with him.

While Zhao Pan was forgetting himself in his sword practice, Xiang Shaolong started chatting with Zhao Qian who was looking from the side, "I didn't expect this child to become so understanding."

Zhao Qian's eyes reddened as she replied, "The person he loves most is Aunt Ni. Now his heart is filled with hatred, not only does he hate Zhao Mu, he also hates Imperial Father. That's why he sees you as a role model and wants to become as smart and brave so that he can avenge Aunt Ni."

Xiang Shaolong looked at Zhao Pan, who has a face of darkened concentration and determination, which is clearly a mismatched expression

for a person of his age at all and he felt iciness in his heart.

His intuition tells him that Zhao Pan will definitely not be an ordinary person in future but for now he cannot guess what great things will he accomplish.

Zhao Qian said quietly, “He accepted me partly because I belong to you, and also because like him, I hate Imperial Father and Zhao Mu greatly as well.”

Xiang Shaolong suddenly felt terrible and he asked, “Doesn’t your Imperial Father respect Lady Ni the most? Why would he just sit there and look at Zhao Mu commit murder? At least he should look into this matter thoroughly. Besides this matter has caused the military much unhappiness and this can become the greatest danger for Zhao since the battle of Changping.”

Zhao Qian sighed sadly, “No one can understand Imperial Father, he wasn’t like that in the past. But after the battle of Changping, he changed totally, becoming indecisive and kept on changing his mind about matters, to the extent that he’s even a little afraid of facing his officials, especially the generals from the military. He allowed Zhao Mu to exercise sole power and cover everything up. Like this matter regarding Lady Ni, he should have given strict orders for a thorough investigation but after Zhao Mu’s interference, he made this into a small matter very easily and thus settled it, making all in the palace disheartened with him.”

From Zhao Qian’s words, Xiang Shaolong saw the other effect the battle of Changping has done to the state of Zhao.

The defeat of that battle is mainly because King Xiaocheng fell for the Qin's extremely juvenile trick of sowing discord and allowed Zhao Gua to replace Lian Po. It can also be considered a clash of power between a newly crowned leader and a powerful old general.

After this greatest defeat in the history of Zhao which totally weakened them, King Xiaocheng lost his confidence and became someone who runs away from reality, to the extent that he's even afraid of seeing the silent reproach in his ministers' eyes.

Therefore Zhao Mu took the opportunity to come in and fulfilled his mental and physical needs.

Maybe the King of Zhao became a homosexual because he has given up on himself, and was embarking on destroying himself out of guilt. Of course it is also possible that he is born like that but what is the true reason, maybe even King Xiaocheng does not know himself.

Zhao Qian said sadly, "I still miss the time when we were escaping from Daliang, hoping to have you hugging and loving me every night. Shaolong! When will we leave this hideous place, find a deserted place and let Qian'er cook for you while you hunt for our livelihood?"

Xiang Shaolong was laughing bitterly to himself, if he had stayed on at Mei Canniang's valley, maybe he would be able to spend the rest of his life like that. But now it's as if he is already riding on the tiger and finds it difficult to dismount, and he can't do it even if he wants to.

Even if he goes to Qin, what he will meet may be even more complicated fights for power. In this ancient warring states period, it seems that there is no paradise to live in. Or else Mei Canniang would not have been almost raped by bandits and Teng Yi's wife and children would not have been killed.

He sighed and told the story about paradise to Zhao Qian. When this pretty princess is totally engrossed in the story, as if her soul has flown to that human utopia, Zhao Ya came back with a somber expression.

Xiang Shaolong and her went into a quiet room for discussion.

Zhao Ya sighed, "On the battlefield Li Mu is an unmatched and fierce warrior, but when it comes to political intrigue he is really too impetuous and also underestimated Zhao Mu's influence over Imperial brother."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed and asked, "What happened?"

Zhao Ya did not reply him directly but said with a troubled look, "They do not understand that after the battle of Changping, what Imperial brother fears most is others telling him he has made a mistake. Now Li Mu is obviously trying to force Imperial brother to admit that he has slipped up in the matter of Sister Ni and blaming him for covering up for the suspected murderer, so how will he be willing to accept this."

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brow, "What actually happened?"

Zhao Ya looked at him and said, "After the feast last night, Zhao Mu entered the Palace immediately to look for Imperial brother, but no one knows what

he told him. Most likely he's blaming the military for using this opportunity to create chaos and to shake Imperial brother's hold on the throne; naturally he won't have anything good to say about you either."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand the term a muddleheaded ruler will bring downfall to the country. When power is concentrated in the hands of one person, this person will become the key to success or failure. Although the modern democratic system is full of cons, but it's a hundred times better than having a muddle headed ruler controlling the life and death of everyone.

Zhao Ya continued, "This morning Imperial brother summoned me and asked me in detail about you and forced me to reveal my real relationship with you, I almost could not handle the questionings."

Xiang Shaolong asked in shock, "How did you answer him?"

Zhao Ya started to look a little unnatural as she replied, "Of course I won't reveal the truth, but it seems that he still believes that I am not enamored of you, or maybe because my reputation in the past was just too bad!" After she spoke she lowered her pretty face, looking troubled.

Xiang Shaolong pinched her chin and lifted up her pretty face, saying, "Now I'm involved with the military and the Wu family, 2 important factions, your Imperial brother won't dare to do anything against me rashly!"

Zhao Ya exclaimed miserably, "I'm worried to death! You must not overestimate the power of the military and the Wu family. If Imperial brother

ignores everything and execute you immediately, by then it'll be too late and no one will really come to a face to face confrontation with Imperial brother over you."

A fury welled up within Xiang Shaolong as he said with an icy laugh, "Want to kill me, I'm afraid King Xiaocheng will need to mobilize his army to do that, I will not let myself be caught so easily."

Zhao ya pouted, "Sometimes you're really like a person with all brawn and no brains. Just Imperial brother's personal guards alone total 20,000, there are about 30,000 soldiers guarding the city and the commander Le Cheng is Zhao Mu's man. If something happens, who can save you. If something were to happen to you, how can I continue living!" As she finished her sentence, hot tears flowed out, obviously she is extremely worried and frightened, but it seems that there's something else as well.

Xiang Shaolong gathered her into his arms and said with a smile, "Don't worry! Someone has once said that I am the new saint who will face many dangers, so I definitely won't die."

Zhao Ya was stunned, "Who said that? What is a new saint?"

She paused and continued without interest, "I am at a loss right now and feeling very troubled, Shaolong teach me quickly what I should do."

Xiang Shaolong was silent for a moment before replying, "Now there's not much choice left, only by escaping from Handan will we have a chance of survival. But before we leave I must tear that Zhao Mu into pieces before the

hatred in my heart can be appeased.”

Zhao Ya caressed his cheeks lovingly, “You must promise to bring Ya’er with you!”

Xiang Shaolong said with surety, “That is of course, not only will I bring you, Xiao Pan and Qian’er will come with us as well.”

Zhao ya asked quietly, “Are we going to Qin. Hai! The Qins are even more frightening than the people from other states!”

Xiang Shaolong said with a laugh, “Don’t forget I am the new saint.” He stood up and continued, “I’m afraid I will only have time to accompany all of you after we reach Qin. King Xiaocheng’s reaction is totally beyond my expectations, I have to look for Li Mu immediately to discuss this and try to mollify your Imperial brother’s feelings.”

Zhao Ya accompanied him out and said, “I will be in charge of keeping an eye of the situation in the palace. Luckily Empress Jing is on your side speaking up for you and Imperial brother is still wavering, so for the time being he would not dare to use such harsh methods to deal with you yet.” As she finished her words she suddenly lowered her pretty face, a look of unfathomable confusion flashed past her pretty eyes.

Of course Xiang Shaolong did not see that, but he just felt troubled.

Zou Yan may really believe that he is some new saint, but he knows that there’s no such thing at all.

If there is a new saint, it should be Ying Zheng.

But the Ying Zheng now, how can he be the new saint who unifies the world?

Xiang Shaolong greatly misses the high tech weapons he used in the 21st century.

In this era, even the most formidable swordsman can only deal with a dozen odd people but not a hundred odd people, much less thousands of well trained soldiers.

Therefore he can only use strategies and tactics so that he will have a chance to preserve his life and escape.

Suddenly, he felt as if he can't bear to leave Handan.

It's finally time to leave this great ancient city.

Chapter 5

Secret discussion of the grand plan

Xiang Shaolong came to Li Mu's Great General Residence in Handan, over a thousand men and horses were gathered in the open area within the walls, all decked out as if they are about to leave immediately.

Xiang Shaolong's heart sunk and when the guard took him to see Li Mu, Li Mu happened to walk out from the building, all dressed in his military attire.

When he saw Xiang Shaolong, he pulled him aside and said, "There's no hope for Great Zhao. His Majesty summoned me to the palace today and wants me to return to the northern border immediately to deal with the Xiong Nus. He did not give me a chance to bring up Zhao Ni's matter at all and even said openly that Zhao Mu will be in charge of Handan. You better leave quickly! Or else you might lose your life."

King Xiaocheng's reaction is obviously beyond the expectations of this famed general.

Li Mu continued in a low voice, "A lot of commanders within Handan used to be my subordinates. I have told them about you and instructed them to help you secretly." He then told him a few names.

He added, "If Zhao Mu sends people to go after you, you can escape to the northern border. As long as you're within my region of power, I will have a way to protect you and even his Majesty can't do anything about that."

Xiang Shaolong did not expect that this person whom he has only met 3 times would actually have such strong feelings of friendship and chivalrous. He was so touched that he was at a loss for words.

Li Mu removed his sword and pressed it to him, “This sword is called ‘Blood Wave’ and a lot more times better than Flying Rainbow. It can cut a flying strand of hair and slice through enemy’s armor like air. With your out of the world swordplay, having this would be akin to adding wings to a tiger. Do no reject, or else I will look down on you.”

Hot tears streamed out from Xiang Shaolong’s eyes as he received this precious sword with the frightening name.

Li Mu patted his shoulder and said, “Wherever can accommodate you, just go to that place! Maybe one day we will meet on the battlefield and by then we’re serving different masters and we may have to fight to the death. I will definitely not give way and you must do the same to me as well.”

After he finished his words he laughed loudly, with seemingly unending sadness and bravery. He then got up his horse and left his residence, towards his journey north.

Xiang Shaolong’s feelings were mixed as he looked at him numbly and for a moment felt all alone in the world.

He took the sword out for a look and saw on the especially long and shiny sword, there seems to be red lines on the body, looking like waves.

On the pommel of the sword were the words ‘Blood Wave’ written in the ancient form.

The joy from last night has suddenly flown away without a trace and the only thing he can do now is to rely on his own intelligence and ability and make sure that the Wu family and those that he love will be able to leave this lawless place safely.

Xiang Shaolong left the Great General Residence feeling at a loss.

Without a highly respected man like Li Mu handling the situation, no matter how unhappy the military is with Zhao Mu, they would not dare to risk the lives of their whole clan and speak up about Zhao Ni’s case, and no one will dare to stand on his side. He has no wish to implicate others too, so now he can only rely on the Wu family and himself.

Li Mu has been ordered to return to the northern border, the military world in the state of Zhao all knows clearly the King’s wishes, which is to stand on the same side as Zhao Mu and he, Xiang Shaolong, is Zhao Mu’s biggest thorn in the flesh so naturally he will have difficulty keeping himself alive.

Not many will be willing to help others in distress, but there’ll be a lot of people who will gladly rub salt into wound, because they can strike a blow to the Wu family and at the same time ingratiate themselves with Zhao Mu.

Now the biggest question is, when will Zhao Mu gain the King of Zhao’s agreement to get rid of the Wu family and Xiang Shaolong.

Is there a way to delay the King of Zhao from making this decision?

Just as he returned to the Wu fortress feeling troubled, Tao Fang came up and said, “That Chu person called Dan Jin has been captured and locked in our jail. However this is a very stubborn person and refused to talk at all. Now we’re waiting to see what you suggest, maybe we might have to torture him seriously.”

Xiang Shaolong seems to see a ray of hope and asked, “Have you searched his bags?”

Tao Fang sighed, “It’s just some unimportant stuff. With Zhao Mu’s cunningness, he will never let others catch hold of him so easily.” He continued, “Even if this person is willing to cooperate obediently and stand out to testify against Zhao Mu, Zhao Mu can still push all blame away and instead point out that we’re accusing him. Ha! Do you think King Xiaocheng will believe his man or us?”

Xiang Shaolong quietly sighed, “As long as we know clearly the relationship between Zhao Mu and the Chus, we’ll be able to set a trap for him. That’s why we cannot let go of this clue so easily.”

By now the 2 of them have arrived at the back courtyard and entered a secret doorway in a building into the heavily guarded underground jail.

That Chu spy Dan Jin was tied on a wooden pillar, blood and dirt on his face, looking dispirited. Obviously he has suffered and he lowered his head without saying anything.

Although Xiang Shaolong pities him, but there's no other choice. This is like a war, to be lenient towards an enemy is akin to committing suicide.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly has an idea and pulled Tao Fang aside, "This person is obviously one who is not afraid of death, or else the Chus won't have sent him here to be in charge of such an important mission. But there is a limit to anyone's tolerance, as long as we can find that, we can destroy his will."

Tao Fang said with exasperation, "The question is what way?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "This method is called relentless questioning. Find another 10 odd people and keep on asking him repeated questions, do not allow him toilet breaks or food and most importantly do not let him sleep. During questioning you must use strong light and shine it into his face, I'll want to see how long he can hold on."

This is the first time Tao Fang has heard of such a questioning method and asked doubtfully, "Will it really work?"

Xiang Shaolong replied with certainty, "I guarantee it will. Get someone to deal with the injuries on his body first, give him some clean clothes to change into and you can proceed."

He then told him some techniques on questioning and things to ask, making Tao Fang thinks that it all sounds very feasible before he left to look for Wu Yingyuan.

Wu Yingyuan is receiving a guest in the secret room and when he knows he

has come, immediately invited him in.

He is a totally non-descript merchant, tall but with a dreadful face, his looks doesn't look appealing at all.

After Wu Yingyuan invited Xiang Shaolong for a seat, he said, "Shaolong! This is Mister Tu's most reliable man who has the reputation of being a resourceful strategist Mister Xiao Yuetan."

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, so this is the secret envoy sent by Lu Buwei's number 1 headman, Tu Xian. So from this it seems that Lu Buwei is going all out to send Zhuji and her son back to Xianyang in the shortest time possible.

Xiao Yuetan is quite polite and said, "Before I came to Handan, I've already heard the great name of Master Xiang. Please do not be offended, but my face now is a fake one but due to uncontrollable circumstances, I cannot see others with my real looks."

Xiang Shaolong suddenly realized that this person is an expert in disguise, and no flaws could be seen at all on the surface. He had an idea and said, "So it means that Mister can turn the Crown Prince and his mother into any looks."

Xiao Yuetan nodded his head, "Master Xiang's train of thought is very quick, this is exactly one of the reason Master Tu send me here to Handan. But as for sneaking them out, it will have to depend on all of you."

Xiang Shaolong was about to say that it's not difficult at all to sneak them out but Wu Yingyuan gave him a kick under the table so he hurriedly swallowed his words.

Wu Yingyuan interrupted, "If we can save mother and son, how will Mister Lu receive us on his end?"

Only now did Xiang Shaolong suddenly realized that with their abilities, and with Xiao Yuetan's skills for disguise, it's not a problem saving mother and son at all. The difficulty is that the Wu family are all going to run away at the same time, that's why Wu Yingyuan is linking Yingzheng and his mother with the Wu family in order to force Lu Buwei to receive them as well.

Indeed Wu Yingyuan added, "The Hostage Residence is heavily guarded and ever since King Zhuangxiang ascended the throne, a troop of Imperial Guards have been stationed permanently in the residence. The city of Handan's strict security is also famed throughout the land so other than a forceful attack, there is no other way. But Mister Xiao need not worry, we have already made plans and can guarantee that we will send both mother and son out of the city without any danger to them."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is exaggerating, there's no grand plan to save them yet but if it was him, he can only do the same thing as well and lie to gain the other party's trust.

Xiao Yuetan replied, "My Master has discussed this matter with King Zhuangxiang. When the time comes our army will pretend to attack Prince Taiyuan and attempt to take over the city to lure the Zhao's attention while

Master Tu will personally lead a troop of elite soldiers and infiltrate into the Zhao border to receive you. As long as you can reach the western bank of Northern Liaoyang's lake, Master Tu will be able to escort you past the borders of Wei and Han back to our country." He paused and asked, "Can I first listen to your marvelous plan."

Xiang Sholong secretly thought him formidable. He has said so many things, but in actual fact he did not reveal at all the position and route of the elite troops Tu Xian is leading, because if they are to work in tandem, Tu Xian should already be within Zhao borders.

Wu Yingyuan kicked him under the table again, obviously he wants him to immediately present a nonexistent plan to deal with this esteemed guest.

Xiang Shaolong has no plans at all, so he pretended to be mysterious and said, "Can Mister Xiao wait for 3 days, because the most important factor in the plan is to make contact with the mother and son and I am still in the midst of arranging this matter. Only after I get some headway on this can I make final confirmations on the other details."

Xiao Yuetan said a little unhappily, "At least you should reveal a little information to me?"

Xiang Shaolong said calmly, "Your appearance may lead to changes to the whole plan. We may even make use of your skill of disguise to let us leave Handan without anyone even realizing it, that's why we need to make new arrangements."

Xiao Yuetan's expression looks a little more soothed as he said, "I understand a little now!" He turned towards Wu Yingyuan and said, "I heard that the dace courtesans in the Wu family are famous throughout the land, how can I miss that."

Wu Yingyuan chortled, "I've made arrangements for you long ago!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that he's no longer needed so he slipped out.

As soon as he stepped out of Wu Yingyuan's inner residence, Xiang Shaolong felt extremely fatigued. The fortress is peaceful in the afternoon. In the garden the maids and children were playing ball, with waves of laughter. The snow on the ground has already been swept clean but icicles still hung on the tree branches.

When he walked past, the prettier maids were making eyes and flirting with him, hoping to gain his attention.

But this man who has always been flirtatious only felt a sense of sadness.

Although Wu Yingyuan said that he will move most of the people out of Zhao earlier, but everyone knows that it only means the closest and direct family members, as for the distant relatives and these maids in front of him here, they will all be heartlessly deserted and ultimately become the object of the Zhao people's wrath.

This is a helpless matter, even Xiang Shaolong can do nothing about it.

In this era where men vie with one another, a person's fate is not controlled in his own hands.

Heaven will suddenly turn into horrible hell!

He is not worried that Lu Buwei will betray them. In this unstable land with constant wars, the Wu family's livestock business is extremely important to the military and economy and with the formidable father and son team in the Wu family, they will certainly spread out part of their resources and won't leave anything to the Zhaos. That will be a fatal blow to the state of Zhao and they will find it even more difficult to survive. This is also the retribution of the King of Zhao.

Wu Yingyuan is a strategist, and has already planning everything quietly since a few years ago. Just looking at how he has taken a liking to him and married his most beloved daughter to him, is enough to proof how bold and far sighted he is.

Only this kind of person can live happily in a world like this.

Whistling was heard from behind.

Before he even have a chance to turn his head back for a look, Jing Jun is already next to him like a gust of wind, his attitude relaxed.

Xiang Shaolong asked curiously, "Succeeded?" Naturally he's asking about Zhao Zhi.

Jing Jun shook his head happily and said nonchalantly, “She kept on ignoring me, in the end I followed her home but she chased me away with her sword.”

Xiang Shaolong was surprised, “Then I really cannot guess why you can still be so happy now!”

Jing Jun chuckled, “The interesting thing is that her father is actually a school teacher, he came out and reprimanded me sternly, saying a whole lot of things about see no evil and speak no evil or words to that meaning. Actually I didn’t hear a single word he said, but on the account of his pretty daughter, I pretended to accept his teachings and lowered my head. Maybe he saw that I should be good in studies, he actually said something about teachings, and told me to go to school every day and learn the ways of being a man. I just have to give him some smoked meat during the New Year or major festivals. Hee! At that time Zhao Zhi was almost mad with fury and kept staring at me, but there’s nothing she can do at all. Brother Xiang don’t you think this is exciting?”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and laughed. To be harassed by someone like Jing Jun, Miss Zhao Zhi is going to be in trouble. She can’t win him in fights nor can she chase him away, how is she going to deal with him?”

Jing Jun asked, “Where has Brother Teng gone?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “He has a special task and has gone to the farm outside the city.”

As he said this, he suddenly had an idea and asked, “Is there a way to make

thousands of warhorses suddenly feel weak in the legs and unable to walk?"

Jing Jun furrowed his brows, "Just have to feed them some herbs, but if the quantity is too huge, it might be a little difficult."

Xiang Shaolong thought that he should be asking Wu Yingyuan this, since the Wu family has been in the livestock business for generations. No one would be more experienced than them.

Jing Jun said excitedly, "Is there anything you want me to do!"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "Just go and study in peace! But remember Brother Teng's instructions, don't go overboard, we still have to go to the Hostage Residence tonight."

Jing Jun gave a reply and left laughingly.

Xiang Shaolong stepped into his Hidden Dragon Abode and only thought of having a good sleep, not wanting to think of anything else.

When he woke up, it's already dusk.

Xiang Shaolong regained his spirit and he felt more optimistic and energetic as well.

Naturally Wu Tingfang and the rest served him meticulously.

Chunying and the rest of the maids looked a little upset, naturally they were

blaming him for not having had his way with them today yet.

He can only laugh bitterly in his heart. His stamina may be a lot better than the average person, but resources are still limited and although the 4 ladies are young, beautiful and alluring, but more important matters are at hand so he can only suppress his urge.

During dinnertime, Lady Ya's loyal servant Zhao Da actually came looking for him.

Xiang Shaolong thought that Zhao Ya has something urgent so he hurriedly put down his bowl and chopsticks and invited him into the inner chamber.

Zhao Da has a strange expression and it was only after a while that he said, "Lady has no idea that I've come here to look for you."

Xiang Shaolong felt that something is very wrong and asked sincerely, "Just say it out boldly! I will be responsible for you."

Zhao Da said, "Actually for servants like us, we have no right to interfere in Lady's affairs at all, but in our hearts, the few of us brothers have already viewed you as the Master who is most worthy of our loyalty, therefore we can't be too concerned about other matters now!"

All the more Xiang Shaolong felt that something is amiss and egged him to reveal the purpose of his visit.

Zhao Da made up his mind bravely and said somberly, "After Lady returned,

in less than a month, a person called Qi Yu who is a royalty from the state of Qi came to Handan as an envoy. This person looks even more handsome than Lian Jin, and famed in Qi for his intellect and swordsmanship, he's also an expert with the ladies. But after he arrived in Zhao, he seems to be smitten with Lady and was pursuing her relentlessly. His Majesty and Zhao Mu also kept creating chances for him to meet with Lady and it seems that Lady is a little interested in him too."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved on hearing that, he is very confident of himself in this aspect and he also does not believe that Zhao Ya, who has gone through difficult times with him, would have a change of feelings so easily.

Zhao Da looked at his expression and said anxiously, "There are some things which I must say even if I don't wish to. After Lady came back, she missed you so terribly that she has no appetite at all, and there were constant rumors in the city about your death. That Qi Yu took the opportunity and spent a few nights in Lady's room. It was only after your return that Lady kept her distance from him but he came last night again to harass Lady and only left this morning. Us brothers had a discussion before deciding to come and inform you."

Xiang Shaolong's heart froze immediately. With Zhao Ya's s.luttish character, in such a situation where she was pining for him, she really needs the consolation and excitement of other men in order to rid herself of the pain and loneliness.

Humans are not without feelings. Such matters between men and women, once started will be difficult to break off, especially when this Qi Yu is not any

worse than him. That's why Zhao Ya is still being tangled up with him right now.

Hai!

A s.lut is a always s.lut. It may be something to do with the hormones in her body, to ask her not to have a man for a long period of time will be a very difficult matter.

A feeling of pained betrayal welled up in him.

Zhao Da lowered his voice and said, "If Lady is just having fun with that man, we won't do something so unscrupulous as to tell on her. We are extremely gratuitous towards Lady and are willing to die for her, but we're afraid that not only is she being cheated of her feelings and body, there might be something else and if it harms you, it won't be worth it."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "What is it all about?"

Zhao Da said painfully, "We have been secretly checking on this Qi Yu and realized that every time after he meets Lady, he will immediately sneak over to see Zhao Mu."

Xiang Shaolong was utterly shocked, "What?"

Zhao Da's eyes reddened as he lowered his head, his hands clenched tightly into fists, obviously his heart is filled with fury and regret.

To him, Xiang Shaolong is a trustworthy hero and only he can be a match for Lady Ya whereas Zhao Mu is a person everyone in Handan hates, so one can imagine his feelings right now.

Xiang Shaolong slowly understood.

This lure of using handsome man is truly formidable!

If Zhao Mu can control Zhao Ya again, then on their side no one will be able to leave Handan and it will also be the end of Zhu Ji and her son. Because Zhao Ya is extremely familiar with all their movements and secrets.

But it seems that although Zhao Ya is still being tangled up with Qi Yu, she has not betrayed him yet. Thinking of her distressing expression today as she told him to take her away from Zhao, and yet afraid that the Qins would be unreliable, he can understand her feelings of uncertainty. After all, the King of Zhao still dotes on her a lot, will she really be willing to betray King Xiaocheng?

She wanted to leave the state of Zhao mainly because there is no hope for the state and she does not wish to end up being in a destroyed state, and Qi Yu can give her protection, bringing her back to the state of Qi, which is separated from the Qins by the state of Zhao.

Obviously there is a secret agreement between Qi and Chu and they will go through all means to stop the 3 states from joining, to the extent that they will split the 3 states among themselves. Therefore Zhao Mu was able to invite Xiao Weimou to deal with him and now he can ask the expert in love to

snatch his beloved away from him.

Naturally the King of Zhao is backing this up because he does not want Zhao Ya to get involved with the Wu family, and at the same time he wants to make use of Zhao Ya to understand the Wu family's secrets and when the time is ripe, he will exterminate the Wu family from the roots and take over all the livestock farm, getting rid of this thorn in his flesh.

Xiang Shaolong's train of thought kept expanding, and thought that maybe the King of Zhao may also be a participant in Zhao Ni's incident, because Xiao Pan once said that they fell into a deep sleep after eating the snacks the King sent them.

The King of Zhao allowed Zhao Mu to do this because he thought that Lady Ni gave herself to Xiang Shaolong only because she could not tolerate the loneliness. Therefore as long as Zhao Mu can give her the same enjoyment, they will be able to win her back. They did not expect Zhao Ni to be so fiercely protective of her chastity that she actually committed suicide after being raped.

With such comprehension, everything that he did not understand in the past now seems to fall into place.

The reason why Zhao Mu can single handedly cover up the case of Zhao Ni's death is because he had the approval of the King of Zhao. He did not want to reveal his own part in the evil deed so he'd rather offend Li Mu and forcefully suppressed this matter.

He has truly given up on the state of Zhao.

On his revenge name list, the King of Zhao's name has been added.

Now the most problematic matter is Zhao Ya.

Has she fallen too deeply with Qi Yu?

No wonder the King of Zhao handed Zhao Qian so readily to her.

But is it possible Empress Jing is also putting on an act? Deliberately luring him to assassinate Zhao Mu so that the King of Zhao will have an excuse to execute the Wu family.

Once he thought of this, he can't help but feel cold sweat running down his back.

Zhao Da asked, "Master! What should we do now?"

Xiang Shaolong sighed and said, "You will just pretend that you don't know anything about this at all, and from now on don't follow or carry any investigations about Qi Yu. This is extremely important, understand?"

Zhao Da nodded his head, wanting to say something but stopping himself.

Xiang Shaolong thought of a matter and asked, "All of you are so loyal towards your Lady, but aren't you going to tell her when you obviously know that Qi Yu has been going to see Zhao Mu?"

Zhao Da replied, "We told her long ago but was instead reprimanded, saying that Qi Yu is the envoy from Qi, so naturally Zhao Mu will have to make him feel welcome. She even said she will not let us off lightly if we continue to follow Qi Yu."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed, it seems that Qi Yu has really enticed this fickle minded slut, why else would she not allow Zhao Da to continue his investigations.

If he can snatch her away from Lian Jin's hands, of course others can snatch her away from his hands. This is very fair.

Besides, with Lady Ya giving out favors so readily in the past, proves that she always like to try new things.

Zhao Da could not take it any longer and said, "If Lady really allies herself with Qi Yu, we all hope that we can come and follow you instead."

With Zhao Da's loyalty, to actually say such words that betrays his master, obviously shows how disappointed and upset they are towards Zhao Ya.

Zhao Ya has already betrayed him once, will history repeat itself again.

When she knows that there's no hope of escape, will she betray him again because of Qi Yu and her own interest?

Xiang Shaolong felt extreme fury and said quietly, "One day, if I can really become someone important, I will be most happy to accept all of you if you

come and look for me.”

Zhao Da thanked him happily before leaving.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling troubled, his mind in a blank, not wanting to think at all.

The ladies all saw his strange expression and hurriedly asked him for the reason.

How can he tell them his worries, so he hardened his heart and said, “Chunying, all of you go and prepare hot water, I want all of you to accompany me in the pool.”

Chunying and the rest all understand what he is referring to and their pretty faces blushed immediately, but they cannot conceal their happiness as they all rushed towards the pool.

Xiang Shaolong forced his spirits up and secretly thought that he will face problems as they come. He's not afraid of anyone at all.

At this moment what he needs the most is excitement, so that his spirit can be released from feelings of despair and anger. The stronger person will conquer.

Fine!

Let me, Xiang Shaolong, see who is the stronger person.

Chapter 6

The real and fake Ying Zheng

As the northern wind blew, Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun climbed over walls quietly, avoiding the patrols and gantry posts and arrived at the garden outside Zhuji's building.

Jing Jun stayed behind as a look out while Xiang Shaolong took the familiar route to the window on the 2nd floor, pushed it gently, and the window opened immediately.

Zhu Ji's voice called out quietly from inside, "Is it Shaolong? Come in quickly!"

Xiang Shaolong slipped in through the window.

Zhu Ji hurriedly closed the window, turned around and leaned on the window ledge, her chest heaving, obviously she is feeling very nervous.

Only a weak, lone lamp was shining in the room but because it's placed on the corner of the window ledge, it will not reflect their shadows on the papered window.

The lamp emphasized half of the right side of Zhu Ji's body while her left side was cast in the shadows, making her dainty and voluptuous body look all the more dimensional and extremely alluring.

A stove was lit in the room, making it as warm as spring, which is why although Zhu Ji was thinly dressed, she still felt comfortable.

Her pretty eyes burned like fire, with a warmth that can scald as they stared unwaveringly at Xiang Shaolong, as if she's trying to scrutinize him inside out.

This is the first time Xiang Shaolong has met such a bold and wild character, a woman who is not afraid of men at all and his heart can't help but beat faster but on the surface he looked at her coolly.

This is definitely not a simple woman.

Zhu Ji's lips quivered slightly as she asked, "Xiang Shaolong! Can I trust you?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled slightly, "It seems that Lady has no other choice!"

Zhu Ji's pretty eyes stared at him, "Even if I can trust you, but what ability do you have that will enable you to take me and my son away."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought, "Since I can infiltrate into this place, naturally I can bring you out. He was about to blurt this out when he suddenly felt that something was amiss and changed his words, "This is the reason why I came to discuss with Lady, because I guessed that Zhao Mu will certainly gather all his men at the Hostage Residence."

Zhu Ji nodded her head, "You're very astute, no wonder Zhao Mu is so wary of you. Every time they talk about you, I will listen very carefully. I did not

expect Buwei to actually find you, it's really great."

Xiang Shaolong heard that when she was talking about Lu Buwei, she seems to be talking about a stranger and was secretly startled. I seems that she will not be loyal to any man. Men are making use of her, she is also making use of men.

He furrowed his brows and asked, "How is the situation at the Crown Prince's side?"

Zhu Ji sighed lightly, "Unless you can lead a huge army and successfully attack Handan City, or else you can forget about taking him away. Ever since my husband ascended the throne, Zhao Mu has transferred 200 highly skilled warriors who is constantly by his side day and night on rotation shifts. He also added high walls outside, making it a residence within a residence. Also, there is a troop of almost a thousand soldiers who have been posted here permanently to guard. Unless you can turn into a bird, or else you can forget about infiltrating that place to see him."

Xiang Shaolong's brows furrowed deeply on hearing this. When Wu Yingyuan was telling Xiao Yuetan about how heavily guarded the Hostage Residence is today, he was not exaggerating, instead he even 'understated' the real situation.

Zhu Ji continued nonchalantly, "Besides it's no use even if he is saved. Zhao Mu is an expert in using drugs and has given him s strange herb and he must take the antidote regularly to ensure his safety. If there's no antidote, he will die of poisoning in less than 10 days."

Xiang Shaolong feels as if his whole spine has been frozen into an ice pillar.

Oh my gosh! Is this going to be the future Emperor Qin?

This time he is really stuck between a rock and a hard place, unable to advance or retreat at all.

And he thought that saving mother and son would only require the lifting of a finger, he is really too naïve.

He breathed out a gush of cold air, “By keeping the Crown Prince like this, besides giving vent to their anger, what other good does it do to the Zhao?”

Zhu Ji said lightly, “You should have heard of Zhao Mu’s nefarious plot, to deliberately use wine and women to make him into a useless person. To tell the truth, Zhao Mu can’t wait to send him back to become the King of Qin. But the time is not yet ripe, because Lu Buwei will stand to gain from it, do you understand?”

Of course Xiang Shaolong understands. The reason why Lu Buwei is so anxious to send mother and son back to Xianyang is because he wants to strengthen his relationship with King Zhuangxiang.

At this instant he finally realized that when Zhu Ji was talking about her son, she only said ‘he’ and did not address him in any other form or utter his name directly. He tone was so indifferent that it’s scary and for a moment he can’t help but feel perplexed.

Zhu Ji suddenly said with hatred, “It’s better that this lad is dead, I get furious for no reason just at the sight of him.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, people said that no matter how vicious a tiger is, it will not eat its offspring. Why would Zhu Ji curse her precious son who can make her become the Empress Dowager?

Zhu Ji moved over, took his hand and pulled him as she walled towards the bed and said gently, “Come! Let’s continue the conversation on the bed!”

Firstly Xiang Shaolong is totally not in the mood and secondly, he just had a wild time with Chunying and the maids and is still tired and thirdly, he remembered the advice not to have any amorous relationship with this woman whom both Lu Buwei and King Zhuangxiang was enamored with so he immediately slipped his hand away and grabbed hers, saying “I’m afraid this is not a suitable time and place!”

Zhu Ji pouted, “Don’t you think I know? It’s just that those maids have been ordered to come and check on me every once in a while. It’s a lot safer hiding in the bed.”

Xiang Shaolong thought that he has misunderstood her so he hurriedly followed her into the curtained bed and immediately a fragrance wafted into his nose.

Zhu Ji told him to lie down inside and used the blanket to cover the both of them. She turned around and snuggled into his arms and hugged him tightly, her tiny mouth going up to his ears and whispered, “I want to tell you a huge

secret, but first you must make a blood oath not to tell anyone else before I can let you know. Hai! I have no other choice but to tell you as well. I am not allowed to take even a step out of this place and there's no one I can trust."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly surprised, what secret can be so great that he needs to make a blood oath?

He answered, "I, Xiang Shaolong, is a man of my words. Once I've made a promise, I won't go back on my words, Lady can rest assured."

Zhu Ji said with relief, "I know you are a trustworthy man, but I am still worried, so why don't you just give in to me!"

With a beauty besieging him like this, he has no choice but to make a blood oath. At the same time he was secretly laughing, he doesn't even believe a blood oath will become true, so what restriction can this promise do to him? But since he's made the promise, he will not reveal it so readily.

Zhu Ji was hesitant for a moment before saying quietly, "The child they imprisoned is not my son at all."

Xiang Shaolong almost shrieked in surprise.

Heavens! What is this all about?

Before Zhu Ji has a chance to talk further, there was a knock on the door and the maid outside asked, "Is Lady asleep? His Marquis is here!"

Xiang Shaolong was terribly startled and was about to jump up when Zhu Ji pressed him down. She extended her hand and pushed on a decoration at the front of her bed and the place where Xiang Shaolong was lying on immediately became a movable board and he was flipped to a secret compartment under the bed.

In that instant, instead of lying in the warm blankets on the bed above, Xiang Shaolong is now lying in the secret compartment beneath which only has a blanket as a base. Luckily there are holes for ventilation so he has no lack of air.

The door opened and Zho Mu's voice said, "Beauty, I've come to visit you!"

Zhu Ji replied, "Marquis looks so energetic today, something good must have happened today to make you so happy, I am so happy for you as well!"

At this moment Xiang Shaolong, who is hiding in the secret compartment, guessed that where he is lying must be the personal secret compartment of that 'adulterer' Guo Kai. After hearing what she said he has to compliment Zhu Ji for knowing how to make a man feel good.

Later he could 'feel' Zhao and Zhu sitting down on the bed, followed by kissing sounds and Zhu Ji's alluring 'moans' and panting.

After a moment, Zhao Mu smiled, "I heard that your lover Lu has sent Tu Xian to come to Handan to save you, are you happy, beauty?"

Zhu Ji pouted, "Don't you know my heart? Without you, I am not going

anywhere, besides it's only a rumor! Who would be so stupid as to come here on a death mission?"

Xiang Shaolong who is below was secretly thinking that she's formidable because Zhu Ji is obviously trying to test Zhao Mu's news.

Indeed Zhao Mu gave a cold snort, "How can it be a rumor, now the old officials of Qin are in a fierce fight with Lu Buwei and wants him to bear the responsibility of the death of the previous King. I'm afraid even your King Zhuangxiang won't be able to protect him. Once Lu Buwei is dead, I will naturally send you and your son back to Xianyang, by then do not forget about me."

Although Zhao Mu did not say anything, but Xiang Shaolong and Zhu Ji both guessed that the news must have come from the powerful Qin officials who want to topple Lu Buwei.

The fights between the Qin court and the local control for power have now widened.

The main battlefield is in the Qin court whole the side battle is being fought at Handan.

An originally very simple matter has now become extremely complicated, especially what Zhu Ji said earlier, it extremely unexpected and earth shattering.

Zhu Ji threw a tantrum and said, "Not going back! Not going back! I am

definitely not going back, just let Zheng'er go back, I want to stay here with you."

Even Xiang Shaolong below was dumbfounded on hearing that. How can she sound so sincere and real, if she's in the 21st century, she'll definitely be a superstar in the entertainment industry.

Zhao Mu was totally taken in and they started kissing again, followed by the sounds of Zhao Mu removing their robes and the lecherous laughter and moans of the coupling between a man and a woman. Xiang Shaolong can only lament on his bad luck down below. If they start to have fun on the bed, he will feel even worse.

If he wants to kill Zhao Mu now, it'll be as easy as lifting a finger, but of course he won't be so stupid as to do that.

Luckily Zhao Mu is still in the mood for talking so he stopped Zhu Ji's attack and said, "The reason I'm so happy today is because that slut Zhao Ya has finally fallen into my trap and unable to pull herself out of it. No one understands her more than I do, not only does she hanker after wealth and riches, she also loves the new and will discard the old. But she's been giving special treatment to Xiang Shaolong. Luckily I still have a killer move, which is King Xiaocheng using their relationship as siblings and by telling her on the pros and cons, there's no way she will not submit."

Xiang Shaolong's heart sunk to the bottom. It's the end! Zhao Ya has really betrayed him. He wonders how much about him has she revealed to her imperial brother? Luckily in order not to cause her undue worry, he did not

tell her a lot of things, or else the outcome would be unthinkable.

Zhu Ji asked deliberately, "Why are you talking about Xiang Shaolong all the time with such hatred, what has he got to do with me? I am not interested in him at all."

How would Zhao Mu know that this sly woman is testing him, or maybe he won't put his guard up against a beauty who has lost her freedom, so he said lightly, "How can there be no relation? The Wu family has always been in contact with Lu Buwei and Xiang Shaolong is the grandson-in-law of the Wu family. If Lu Buwei wants to sneak people out, he'll obviously need the help of the Wu family." He paused and continued with a cold snort, "Xiang Shaolong better not end up in my hands, or else I'll make him regret that he was ever born. You shall watch at the side when I torture him!"

Xiang Shaolong who was hiding beneath was gritting his teeth on hearing it and wished he can jump out and kill him.

Of course Zhu Ji knows that Xiang Shaolong is listening so she can't help but laugh and ask, "How can that inexperienced lad win you? He'll end up in your hands sooner or later, and you can do what you want with him."

Apparently Zhao Mu got excited on hearing it and said, "Come! Get up the bed!"

At least Zhu Ji has some conscience and she objected, "You come looking for me in the middle of the night and now you've made me hungry, where can I find the mood."

Obviously Zhao Mu is totally enthralled by her and hurriedly summoned the servants to prepare snacks for her before saying with satisfaction, "No one in Zhao dares to offend me now. As soon as I exterminate the Wu family from the roots, no one else will dare to do anything without my approval."

Zhu Ji flattered him and said gently, "I think Xiang Shaolong must be a total idiot, or else why would he think that Zhao Ya who is famous in the world for being a slut would be loyal to him?"

Xiang Shaolong can only laugh bitterly, these few words of Zhu Ji are obviously meant as a free gift for him.

Zhao Mu did not expect that there is a twist to all this and replied seriously, "You're wrong! Zhao Ya has indeed given her true feelings to Xiang Shaolong, that's why she's still helping him hide a lot of things. But I understand her too well, so there's no way she can win me. If she doesn't want to die together with Xiang Shaolong, she'll have to work with me obediently." He sighed comfortably and said, "Not only is Xiang Shaolong not an idiot, he's very formidable as well. If not for Zhao Ya this weak link, it'll still be uncertain who will win in the end."

Xiang Shaolong thought of one thing and was sweating immediately.

If Zhao Qian told Zhao Ya about how Ji Yanran and Zou Yan saved them in Daliang, and she told Zhao Mu, then Ji Yanran and Zou Yan will be in big danger.

At this time the maids came to inform that the food is ready.

Zhao Mu and Zhu Ji went out of the room.

What better time to leave than now?

Xiang Shaolong secretly thanked heavens and slipped away.

Zhao Qian tossed and turned in bed, unable to get to sleep.

Without Xiang Shaolong next to her, she felt lost and alone.

She then thought of Zhao Pan, this child who has lost his mother is slowly becoming frighteningly melancholy. Only when he's with her or Xiang Shaolong will he show a little naivety and happiness, and he won't even give any face to Zhao Ya.

If he has shown himself to be a little weaker, maybe Zhao Qian will feel better.

Right at this time, the curtains were suddenly lifted and she was about to scream when she heard Xiang Shaolong's familiar voice call out, "Qian'er! It's Shaolong!"

Zhao Qian never expected her beloved would appear next to her bed in the middle of the night and threw herself at him in joy, hugging him in a death grip.

Xiang Shaolong removed his shoes, hugged her and snuggled into the blankets. He gave a long kiss before asking quietly, "Did you tell Lady Ya

about how Sister Yanran saved us?”

Zhao Qian is extremely astute and she asked in shock upon hearing his words, “Is there something wrong with her? Why would there be a problem telling her?”

Xiang Shaolong’s expression changed, “That means you’ve already told her!”

Zhao Qian shook her head, “I didn’t. But it’s not because I don’t trust her, but because I’ve promised Sister Yanran that I will never reveal this matter to anyone. That’s why I only told her the story that we agreed on long ago.”

Xiang Shaolong heaved a great sigh of relief.

Zhao Qian’s body trembled, “Heavens! What has Lady done? To make you actually sneak in here in the middle of the night just to ask me such a question?”

Xiang Shaolong caressed her back lovingly, “Have you seen her tonight?”

Zhao Qian replied, “I heard that she has a guest so it’s inconvenient for me to go over. Hai! I remember now, every time they say there’s a guest, Xiao Zhao and the rest will have a very strange expression, as if they are furious but unable to say anything about it. Could that guest be Zhao Mu?”

Xiang Shaolong has already been numbed by all these, he will no longer get agitated over Zhao Ya and Qi Yu’s secret rendezvous. He is someone who is able to take things lightly.

He had once suggested to Zhao Ya to allow Jing Jun and the rest to protect her but she rejected him determinedly. At that time he didn't think too much of it but now he knows that she did not want to let him know about her affair with Qi Yu.

Zhao Qian pleaded, "Xiang Lang! Please tell me what this is all about?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Did you notice anything strange about Lady these few days?"

Zhao Qian thought carefully for a moment before replying, "Now that you mention it, it really seems that Lady is different from the past. Not only is she listless, there was even once I found her crying alone but when I asked her, she just said that she was thinking of Lady Ni. Sometimes she would also throw her temper at the servants for nothing." She pouted and hastened him to talk, "What is this all about! This suspense is making me feel terrible!"

Xiang Shaolong sighed and said, "Think again, did she say anything special, for example words like we'll never be able to escape or something along that line."

Zhao Qian replied, "That she did not, but she did mention once that Lu Buwei can't even protect himself now and he can face clan extermination any time. If we follow the Wu family and throw our lots with him, it's akin to sending the sheep to the tiger's den."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Then how did you answer her?"

Zhao Qian kissed him and said, “I said as long as I can follow you, death doesn’t matter at all.” She trembled and continued, “That’s right! At that time she had a very strange expression, now that I think of it, she looks almost ashamed and regretful. After that she made an excuse and left.”

By now Xiang Shaolong has totally given up on Zhao Ya.

Zhao Mu is right, he understands Zhao Ya more than him. That’s why he can use make use of this fickle minded woman twice to harm him.

After heaving a sigh, he told the gist of what happened to Zhao Qian.

Zhao Qian had already guessed what has happened and was strangely calm.

Xiang Shaolong told her, “You have to pretend that nothing has happened.”

Zhao Qian kissed him lovingly and said gently, “Qian’er understands, I have great confidence in this new saint here and I know you will definitely be able to bring Qian’er and the Wu family past this difficult period safely.”

Before Xiang Shaolong left he asked, “Will you be able to bear abandoning your father and follow me to an unknown fate?”

Zhao Qian nodded her head with certainty, “As long as I can leave Imperial father, Qian’er is not afraid of anything. There is something I have not told you, which is after my mother died, Qian’er’s nanny once said something bad about Zhao Mu and the words drifted to Imperial father’s ears. He immediately offered poisoned wine to nanny and before she died, she held

my hands and said as she cried, if there is a chance I must go far away from the Palace, being a commoner's daughter is far better than being a Princess."

Xiang Shaolong was full of thoughts when he heard this.

He really cannot understand the mind of royalty, just like how he cannot understand Zhao Ya.

Chapter 7

Lies and trickery

After Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun returned to the Wu Residence, they each went back to their own rooms.

Before they parted, Jing Jun seemed to have something to say but he stopped himself.

Xiang Shaolong knows what he's thinking and said, "Nothing will happen during the day, just rest assured and go to school! But be careful, now in Handan, besides the Wu residence, there's no other safe place."

Jing Jun was ecstatic as he replied, "I am a born hunter, I won't become prey so easily."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he is cunning and smart, and his skills at escaping is unparalleled so he was not worried.

When he returned to Hidden Dragon Abode, all the ladies were already in dreamland.

Although Xiang Shaolong is extremely tired, but his mind and spirit was greatly affected by the string of events that has happened tonight and was not in the mood for sleep at all. He suddenly had an idea, so he sat down on the bed next to his wife and concubine and followed the meditation skills

written on the ‘3 killer moves’, sitting cross legged as he adjusted his breathing, his mind melding with his heart, his heart joined with his spirit, his spirit joined with the universe as he eliminated all thoughts and unintentionally went into a state of nothingness, something he has never experienced before. His spirit seems to leave his body, joining and parting and when he regained his senses, it was already morning and the ladies were awake.

Xiang Shaolong ignored the ladies’ surprise and he was secretly astounded. He has been meditating for more than 2 hours but it felt as if he was asleep and woke up in the blink of an eye. He was sitting cross-legged but he did not feel any numbness in his limbs at all from lack of blood circulation.

When he was training in the special task force, he has learnt Qigong as well, using different methods but he’s never had such a refreshing feeling before and for a moment he’s not really concerned about Lady Ya’s matter.

During breakfast, Chunying and the maids served him especially meticulously with bright and sweet smiles and although it’s the cold winter, he can still feel the allure of spring and his mood turned for the better, filled with the strong desire to fight.

After kissing the ladies, he hurriedly went to look for Xiao Yuetan, who was still sleeping with a beauty in his arms. When he knew he was looking for him, he put on a robe and came out.

At this time Xiao Yuetan’s disguise has been removed, revealing his sharp features, a far cry from what he looked like yesterday, even having an air of

flirtatious charm.

After exchanging civilities, Xiang Shaolong said quietly, “The news of Master Tu coming to Zhao has already been leaked by those in your country who are against Mister Lu, and the King of Zhao and Zhao Mu has learnt of this.”

Xiao Yuetan’s expression changed slightly, revealing a look of surprise and uncertainty.

Xiang Shaolong continued, “But it seems that they still do not know where Master Tu is but it’s certain that they have sent men to search.”

Xiao Yuetan said, “I will send someone to warn Master Tu. Shaolong, Master Tu will be very grateful to you, this news is too important.”

Only now did Xiang Shaolong realize that Xiao Yuetan have not come to Handan alone. Seeing that his tone towards him has changed, he was secretly amused as he said, “Zhao Mu is keeping the Crown Prince very heavily guarded.” He then told him what Zhu Ji has revealed last night, even telling him about how Zhao Mu has been drugging Ying Zheng.

Xiao Yuetan’s expression really changed totally and he was quiet.

Xiang Shaolong has already felt last night that his main purpose is to bring Zhu Ji and her son back to Xianyang and is not at all enthusiastic about how they should bring the Wu family over to the Qin border. Now that he’s heard the true situation, he finally understood that for outsiders like them to save Zhu Ji and her son is impossible, even with the most expert skill of disguise.

Just like what Zhu Ji has said, unless they attack the city, or else how can they bring Ying Zheng away and even if they did, he'll end up dying from poisoning.

Xiao Yuetan took a deep breath and said, "Where did Shaolong get these news from?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "I have men planted around Zhao Mu and last night I finally had the chance to make contact with Lady Zhu Ji, she told me personally."

Xiao Yuetan was impressed with Xiang Shaolong's abilities, and after a moment's hesitation, said, "Shaolong please forgive me for being straight, it seems that the King of Zhao has long been suspecting that the Wu family is in secret contact with our Master Lu, and now that the news of Master Tu coming here has been leaked, anyone can guess that the purpose is to steal away mother and son. Now you are stuck, how will you be able to proceed with the plan?"

Xiang Shaolong said confidently with a smile, "I can only answer you tomorrow, anyway we have not come to the end of the road. Can you please pass the message to Master Tu that if he really wants to bring the Crown Prince and his mother back to Xianyang, both sides must be able to cooperate sincerely."

Xiao Yuetan knows that Xiang Shaolong has seen through their intentions and said with a slight blush, "This is but of course... of course! Heh! I will inform Master Tu."

He continued with furrowed brows, “Zhao Mu is famous for his art in using drugs, how can we solve this issue?”

Xiang Shaolong laughed, “Tomorrow I will have a satisfactory answer for you.”

Xiao Yuetan saw how energized and relaxed he looked and his confidence was raised as well and said with a nod, “It seems that I’ll have to make a personal trip to see Master Tu and I can only be back about 3 to 4 days even at the earliest. I hope by then Shaolong will have good news to share.”

Xiang Shaolong continued talking to him in secret a little more before he left and on the way back bumped into Tao Fang who was out looking for him. He looked spirited and Xiang Shaolong thought that the Chu spy could not even hold out for a day and has revealed the truth. However, Tao Fang only said, “Shaolong’s plan is really useful, it’s just one night and he’s almost half collapsed and only wants to sleep. I don’t think he can hold out much longer and will soon confess.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this can also be considered good news. Such methods may be inhumane but it’s a little better than torturing his body. No matter how strong a person is, under such a situation, will also become extremely weak.

Tao Fang said, “Young Master left the city early this morning to the livestock farm and won’t be back for a few days.” He lowered his voice and added, “He’s going to make arrangements for pulling out of Zhao, it’ll be the Farmers’ Festival in 10 days time and we traditionally have a ‘prayer

ceremony' and the King of Zhao will come personally to the farm to oversee it. At that time we will send part of the family to a secret hiding place which has been prepared long ago and after the grand event, we will send them towards Qin one by one."

Xiang Shaolong was a little relieved. With Wu Yingyuan's farsightedness and planning, anything that he thinks is secure will definitely not have any problems.

Tao Fang led him towards the Wu family mansion and said along the way, "At that time when I met Shaolong at Mulberry Village, I already knew you're no ordinary man but I did not expect you to have such accomplishments today."

Once he mentioned Mulberry Village, Xiang Shaolong can't help but think of Mei Canniang and he turned gloomy!

He did not expect that after coming to this ancient period, there are a lot more things that makes him worry compared to in the past.

Tao Fang knows what he was thinking and tried to console him a little, but he knows that his empty words are of no use at all so he said, "Old Master wants to see you!"

Master Wu met his Grandson-in-law alone in the secret meeting room and came straight to the point, "Find a time today and I'll hold a simple ceremony for you and Fang'er to become official husband and wife."

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly kowtowed and offered his thanks.

He's already developed deep feelings for Wu Tingfang and was glad to have such a pretty wife.

Master Wu furrowed his brows, “I thought with all the intimacy you’ve had, Fang’er would get pregnant very quickly, it’s so strange...”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, although he has thought of this question before, he’s never too bothered about it.

Master Wu did not seem too bothered too and continued, “I want to tell you something important regarding the life and death of the Wu family and even Tao Fang is not aware of this matter. Only a few people who are from the immediate Wu family is aware.”

Xiang Shaolong looked at him quizzically.

Master Wu said with seriousness, “All the residences of Princes and Royalties will have secret tunnels used for escape and this is an open secret to all. We are no exception, we have 4 secret tunnels leading to the outside of our estate and the exit are all near the fortress. But for us, this is just a cover.”

Xiang Shaolong’s eyes immediately brightened and he asked unbelievably, “Is there a secret tunnel that leads to outside the city?”

Master Wu said proudly, “Exactly, this tunnel that leads to outside the east city gates took 3 generations about 70 odd years to complete and is 3 li long. Countless Wu family members have sacrificed their lives building it, a lot of

effort was put into just the layout of the ventilation holes. It's more than 10 feet deep underground and even digging a well won't be so deep down. We made use of an underground river to build it and the entrance is at a secret cave at the back of the hill and it can only be reached via a short tunnel at the back of the house and is extremely covered."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand why the Wu father and son are so confident about escaping from Handan.

Master Wu said, "That's why as long as you have the ability to bring Zhu Ji and her son to the Wu residence, we will be confident of escaping."

Xiang Shaolong was greatly excited and felt his confidence soaring, it seems that the most difficult problem has suddenly been solved.

Master Wu suddenly exclaimed, "This secret tunnel is not easy to travel, it's wet and stuffy. I've used it once when I was young and have never gone down since, and I had hoped that I will never have the need to use it to escape. Now that I'm old, it'll be even more difficult for me to travel!"

Xiang Shaolong said, "I heard from Master Tao that during the Farmers' Festival, we will take the opportunity to send a group of people away, Grandfather you..."

Master Wu interrupted, "If I were to leave as well, it'll be strange if that muddle headed ruler King Xiaocheng does not take immediate action. Everyone can leave except me."

Xiang Shaolong's expression changed on hearing this.

Master Wu smiled slightly, as if he's almost at the end of his road and said gently, "The world now belongs to youngsters like you. I am old and my days are numbered, I do not have the courage to face a new life in Qin and neither can I survive the scares and difficulties involved in escaping. That's why I've already told Yingyuan that I have decided to stay here and not leave."

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "How can the King of Zhao let you off then?"

Master Wu chortled, "Who wants him to let me off? I won't even leave a piece of my skin for him to find. I have been prestigious all my life and even in death will I not be humiliated."

Xiang Shaolong cried out hoarsely, "Grandfather!" For the first time he felt sincere admiration for this plump old man from the bottom of his heart.

Master Wu said suavely, "Don't behave like a woman or a child, I have high expectations of you. In all great matters, someone must be sacrificed. If King Xiaocheng wants to attack my Wu family fortress, he'll have to pay a terrible price. I am really happy, even at a time like this, I still have a group of men who are willing to lay down their lives with me."

He paused and continued, "Once you take Zhu Ji and her son away, King Xiaocheng will attack immediately. If there's no one to block him for a few days, how are all of you going to escape?" He added with resolve, "My mind is made up, do not say anymore."

Xiang Shaolong knows it's difficult to make him change his mind, and in fact this is what he has asked for. He asked, "How many people know about the secret tunnel? It seems that even Tingfang is not aware."

Master Wu replied, "That's why it can remain a secret. Don't worry! Those who know about this is very reliable. If you see Wu Zhuo over the next few days, tell him to lead you to it. As long as we can get out of the city, no one will know how to survive better than generations of livestock farmers like us."

He gave a cold snort and added, "Since he's dishonest, I need not be loyal. Since King Xiaocheng can treat me this way, I want him to have a taste of the most bitter fruit he's ever had after the battle of Changping. I'll make sure there won't be a single usable warhorse in his whole country and let him sit and watch while the state of Zhao is slowly carved apart and disintegrate."

Looking at the gleaming hatred in Master Wu's eyes, Xiang Shaolong suddenly understood that once a person views death as a certainty, he can be a really scary person.

Xiang Shaolong is already mentally prepared for this and riding on his beloved steed which Learned Lady Ji has given him, he went to Zhao Ya's residence and met her at the inner hall. Looking at his beauty who is only a few feet away, Xiang Shaolong however felt that the distance between their hearts is like lakes and mountains apart.

He was more alert to his surroundings and indeed noticed that Xiaozhao and the other maids were a lot quieter, their faces expressionless, with sadness

hidden in their eyes.

Zhao Ya is smiling like a flower as usual but Xiang Shaolong can see that beneath the forced smile the dilemma deep within her heart.

She looked at him in surprise and said, "Shaolong you looked especially in high spirits today, are there new developments." She lowered her voice and added, "Have you caught a hold over Zhao Mu already?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and said, "It's not that easy!"

Zhao Ya asked, "Then are there developments over at Zhu Ji and her son's side?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to look troubled and said with furrowed brows, "The place where mother and son are kept are heavily guarded, there's no way to infiltrate it as well. Do you have a way to let me meet up with them?"

Zhao Ya lowered her head and bit her teeth, "Let me think about it!"

Xiang Shaolong knows that she indeed has feelings for him, or else she would not have revealed so much uncertainty and could have pretended that she's totally not up to the task.

He said with a straight face, "I've been thinking last night, and decided to follow Empress Jing's words and assassinate Zhao Mu."

Zhao Ya was stunned, "Shaolong!" She lifted her pretty face and looked at

him with misery.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling secretly pleased and said with a low voice, "Only by killing Zhao Mu will we have a chance to kidnap Zhu Ji and her son. I now have a batch of about 500 Wu family warriors who are not afraid to die and we have the strength to fight openly with Zhao Mu. As long as I do everything nice and clean, who would dare to say I am the murderer?"

Zhao Ya looked at him, in a loss.

Of course Xiang Shaolong knows that she thought he has already fallen into Empress Jing's trap, and only felt an indescribable pleasure.

Slut, since you want me to die, then let me lie to you for some fun.

"What is the best place to make the move?"

Zhao Ya lowered her head and said quietly, "It's the Farmers' Festival 10 days later, Zhao Mu will go with Imperial Brother to the livestock farm outside the Wu family fortress for prayer ceremonies. Hai! Shaolong you must think it through again."

Xiang Shaolong can feel her inner struggle and pain and his heart softened a little as he said gently, "Don't be so unconfident in me! I will split the 500 men into 2 groups, one group will lay in ambush along the way to ambush your Imperial Brother and Zhao MU's carriage..."

Zhao Ya exclaimed hoarsely, "What? Even Imperial Brother..."

It is exactly Xiang Shaolong's intention to force Zhao Ya to thoroughly betray him. Only by making use of Zhao Ya will he be able to trick the King of Zhao and Zhao Mu. He need not make a pretense of the deep hatred in his eyes as he said, "The way your Imperial Brother covered up for Zhao Mu regarding Lady Ni's matter, needless to say it's because he is the cause of all this. Such an evil fiend, why keep him in this world?"

Zhao Ya looked at him in a loss, then suddenly lowered her head as if she has come to a decision as she bit her lips and said, "Then the other group will go to the Hostage Residence and kidnap them, but how are you going to leave the city?"

Xiang Shaolong said confidently, "I will open a short tunnel that will lead us out of the city at the west of the city. The Wu family has enough manpower and equipment in this area so it's guaranteed that no one will find out. We will also prepare men and horses outside the city and will leave by over 10 different routes to escape. Along the way there will be pre-prepared hiding areas so that even if the big army comes after us, it would be difficult for them to find us. Besides, by then the city of Handan will not have a leader after your Imperial Brother and Zhao Mu's death so they will certainly be in a mess. If Empress Jing comes to power, she won't be so enthusiastic in going after us. This plan can be considered foolproof, and later on I will arrange for you and Qian'er the time and place to meet."

Zhao Ya lowered her head and did not speak, the rapid changes in her expression, which she tried to hide, are all revealed to Xiang Shaolong's eyes.

He pretended to be surprised and asked, "Ya'er! What's wrong? Is there

something wrong with my plan?”

Zhao Ya was startled and regained her composure as she shook her head and replied, “Nothing’s wrong, it’s just that everything’s too sudden for me to accept so quickly.”

Xiang Shaolong deliberately made fun of her and said, “This is being deliberate, as long as we strategize well, I guarantee that the muddle headed ruler and corrupt official will only live for the next 10 days.”

Zhao Ya took a sad look at him and did not say further.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he has laid enough groundwork so he stretched lazily and stood up, “Come! Let us go and look for Qian’er and Xiao Pan!”

Zhao Ya lowered her head and said quietly, “Shaolong!”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that something is wrong, yet he is filled with hope as he asked, “What’s the matter?”

Zhao Ya was hesitant for a moment before shaking her head and said, “It’s nothing, we can talk after we reach the state of Qin.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly, knowing that Zhao Ya has let go of the last chance she has to retain him.

Their relationship has now been terminated!

From now on, all feelings have ceased and they will have nothing to do with each other.

After he left her residence, he can feel the joy of pain.

Pain because of Zhao Ya's change of heart, joy because he has discarded this relationship baggage.

Ever since the last time Zhao Ya allowed Prince Shaoyuan to enter her bedchamber without a reason, he'd already known that she has a weak will when it comes to matters revolving men and women, and this is in her nature. Zhao Ni and her faced almost the same situation but she was not like her, flirting with men everywhere.

This is called a short pain is better than a lengthened torture.

Once he thought of this, he immediately felt an indescribable sense of release.

These 10 days until the actual day, the King of Zhao will deliberately make things easy for him so that he can take his time to arrange the assassination attempt and he can use this as an excuse to confiscate all of the Wu family's extensive assets.

Without a grand excuse, the King of Zhao will never dare to touch the Wu family because it will cause other wealthy families in the country to fear for themselves and start moving to other states and the situation would be terrible. He has really put a lot of thought into this.

Now he only has to find out where the real Ying Zheng is and he will be able to proceed with his secret plan.

Maybe he can even persuade Master Wu to leave with them.

Once he thought about this, he wished that he could sprout wings and fly into the Hostage Residence immediately and ask that alluring beauty Zhu Ji this question.

The weather was bitterly cold as the northern wind howled.

There were not many people or carriages on the streets, all those who can would rather stay home than come out and face the bitter cold.

Hoof beats were heard and a group of riders appeared ahead and as they came nearer, it turned out to be Cheng Xu and 10 over soldiers.

On seeing a friend, Xiang Shaolong went up and greeted him warmly.

Who would have expected that Cheng Xu would suddenly look stunned and he forced out a smile as he said, “Commander Xiang, I have something urgent to attend to, we’ll chat if there’s a chance next time.” And he hurriedly rode away.

Xiang Shaolong stood there stunned.

He can only think of the famous words ‘Men’s heart can turn cold and the world turn icy’.

It seems that no one in Handan welcomes him now.

Behind him he heard hoof beats again as a rider rode past him and swiftly handed him a ball of paper. He opened it and it turns out that Pu Bu is arranging to meet him and it's written on the paper the place and time.

Xiang Shaolong felt a warmth filling his heart as he returned home after tearing up the piece of paper.

Chapter 8

The secret about Ying Zheng

Xiang Shaolong sat alone in the garden in his Hidden Dragon Abode, a manmade fountain spurting water from the stone, forming a winding stream through the rocks. By now the stream is almost turning into ice, with only a small portion of water still flowing in the middle, looking extremely intriguing.

Wu Tingfang and the rest all dared not disturb him.

Thoughts rolled in his mind as he thought of how he first met Zhao Ya on the streets on Handan, how he conquered her in his own way. He also thought of how Zhao Mu touched her all over in the carriage, of how aroused she was with all his ministrations. That there are already premonitions that she will develop feelings for someone else, because she cannot defend herself from any man's flirtations at all.

She is just following her heart, not caring about right or wrong, or else she won't have been so intimate with Zhao Mu knowing fully well that he is causing harm to the country and the people, until he has treated her so badly before she left him. If it were Zhao Ni or Zhao Qian, they would not have gone against him under such threats.

But he still trusted her, upon seeing her pretty and wonderful side, he truly believed her honeyed words.

Of course, if he is still planning to stay on in Zhao, maybe their relationship could have continued. But now it has been proven that she cannot withstand the test of benefits and lust.

People of this era all likes to use ‘trickery of the heart’, the higher the position of the person, the more so.

Cheng Xu who had once gone through thick and thin with him would do a sudden turnabout now caused him much heartache.

Many in this world are those who add salt to wounds, very rare are those who come to help when one is in need.

As he became lost in his thoughts, he was unconsciously following the Mohist meditation technique to stop his thoughts and he immediately felt better. He was suddenly jolted by the sounds of footsteps, it turned out that Tao Fang has come to look for him.

He saw the look of delight on his old friend’s face, who came up to him, swept off the thin layer of snow on the huge rock next to him, sat down and said, “That lad is even lousier than imagined, he’s finally confessed.”

Xiang Shaolong counted the time, if they started the questioning from yesterday, they have at least bombarded him with questions for more than 30 hours, which is not something that one can easily hold up against. He asked happily, “What inside news have you found out?”

Tao Fang was a little miffed as he answered, “Actually he’s only a messenger,

and has no idea what is Zhao Mu's background at all. He purely reports verbally what is happening in Chu and then he'll relay Zhao Mu's words back to Chu's Prince Wen Xin, Chu Leng, who is a top official whom the King of Chu trusts."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "What is Zhao Mu's message this time?"

Tao Fang replied, "He only asked Prince Wen Xing to send someone over with gifts 3 months later, only this point is a little unique. The rest are all normal recent news like the one regarding Xiao Weimou's death."

Xiang Shaolong had a thought and asked, "Is he still being questioned now?"

Tao Fang replied, "Of course! I was afraid he was lying so I followed your instructions and kept forcing him to repeat the details to see if anything does not correspond."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Has he ever been to Handan in the past?"

Tao Fang shook his head, "It's the first time he made contact with Zhao Mu. In order to avoid suspicions, I believe they send different people here every time."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "How long does it take at the fastest to travel between Chu and Zhao?"

Tao Fang said, "If it's a rushed journey on a quick horse, and because there are many checkpoints along the way, just the journey alone will take 2

months. That's why I suspect that this person is lying."

Xiang Shaolong is adept at spying techniques and said with a smile, "No, he is not lying, this is a secret message that will prevent others from forcing the information out. 3 months may be half the time actually meant, in fact he is referring to half a year. Sending gifts over meant the opposite, I've already thought that if Zhao Mu is sent here by the state of Chu, he will never let the 'Secret Manual of Lu Gong' fall into the hands of the Zhaos, so the real meaning is he wants the Chus to send over skilled exponents in half a year's time to steal the secret manual. Zhao Mu is really loyal to the state of Chu."

Tao Fang was enlightened, "So the words all meant the opposite, it's taking gifts, not giving gifts. The Chus are really wily, and Prince Wen Xing already knows that the 'gift' refers to so he will know once he hear the message."

Xiang Shaolong's eyes shone, "Most importantly we have to find out who he pretended to be when he came to Handan and what are the ways he used to make contact, the more details the better. I was just worrying that I won't be able to kill Zhao Mu but this trip will really prove to be exciting."

Tao Fang is beginning to understand his thinking and left excitedly.

Tao Fang had just left and Jing Jun came looking for him, looking totally dispirited.

Xiang Shaolong stood up and smiled, "It seems that the lesson is not that interesting, right?"

Jing Jun came to him and said honestly, “I was bored to death and I dared not offend my future father-in-law. And to think that I had to spend money to buy 10 catties of waxed meat for him, and I did not even get to touch Zhao Zhi’s hand in the end.”

Xiang Shaolong asked, “You did not get to see her?”

Jing Jun sighed, “What’s the use of seeing her, there are so many students, do you think I can really walk up and start touching her? I think most of the people goes there for lessons because of her.”

Xiang Shaolong chortled, “Is she having lessons as well?”

Jing Jun shook his head, “Initially she was sitting at a corner, making me think that she is accompany me for the lesson but in a short while she ran away with a smile and totally disappeared. I couldn’t find her anywhere after the lesson ended. Hai! I won’t ever go again even if you force me with a sword.”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and sighed, “Such impatience, how can you win the lady’s heart.”

Jing Jun only shook his head.

Xiang Shaolong said, “Come with me outside for a walk.”

The 2 of them changed into commoner’s clothes and went up the carriage and out of the stockade before slipping off the carriage at the corner. Jing Jun followed him from afar to see if there’s anyone following him.

An hour later, Xiang Shaolong met Pu Bu at a dense forest south of the city.

Pu Bu said excitedly, "Things are going a lot smoother than imagined. Zhao Mu's number one man Zheng Yue recruited all of us. Not that I am boasting, but us warriors, when Prince Pingyuan was still alive, were quite famous and respected in Handan."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is there any news?"

Pu Bu replied apologetically, "We have just settled down and have not heard anything. I think we will take at least 6 months to a year to fully gain their trust."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "It's all right, you will stay there for a period of time, I will come back to look for you. After we accomplish a big mission, I will bring you back with me."

Pu Bu replied, "We will listen to Master Xiang's instructions." He paused and continued, "Master Xiang! We only hope to follow you."

Xiang Shaolong replied earnestly, "I understand, I will not let you down in your trust and expectations of me."

After they agreed on the mode of contact, Xiang Shaolong asked, "Do you know of this person from Qi called Qi Yu?"

Pu Bu replied, "That is a good question Master Xiang, the first task given to me and Liu Cao is to be his bodyguard and bring him around for fun. Hei! This

lad really has a thing with women, all these women who saw him stuck to him like bees to honey.”

Xiang Shaolong felt a pain in his heart and thought of Lady Ya and asked quietly, “Have you accompanied him to see Lady Ya?”

Pu Bu replied, “That we did not, but last night he did not ask for company and slipped out of the Envoy Lodge, maybe he went to look for her.”

Xiang Shaolong said, “Don’t tell anyone about this. All right! If there’s nothing special, try not to make contact with me, no matter what you hear regarding Zhao Mu’s plans to deal with me, do not try to let me know. You must remember that.”

Pu Bu knows that he’s smarter than the average person and although it doesn’t sound very logical, there must be something to it, so he agreed.

After they parted, Xiang Shaolong went back to the Wu Residence and surprisingly We Yingyuan, Wu Zhuo and Teng Yu were all waiting for him.

In the secret chamber, the few important members of the Wu family, Master Wu, Wu Yingyuan, Wu Zhuo, Tao Fang and Xiang Shaolong were all seated, even Teng Yi as well, which goes to show that because of his relationship with Xiang Shaolong and his outstanding performance, he has already gained the trust of all in the Wu family.

This is an important meeting that will impact the life and death of the Wu family.

Wu Zhuo gave his report first, “Teng Yi and I, under Young Grand-Master-in-law’s instructions, chose 500 men from the 2000 elite soldiers and followed his suggested method and kept testing them. Hei! I did not expect only 77 to pass the tests. We will start training them tomorrow, but I can guarantee that these warriors will be able to fight off a hundred men single-handedly.”

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, “You only have 10 days, make good use of the time.”

Everyone were perplexed, and asked him why he’s so sure there’s only 10 days.

Xiang Shaolong sighed and told them everything, only hiding the matter regarding the fake Ying Zheng, because he has made a promise to keep it a secret.

Wu Yingyuan’s brows furrowed deeply as he asked, “Then how are you going to get mother and son out? Won’t it be even worse if he dies of poisoning after being rescued?”

Xiang Shaolong replied confidently, “There is a twist to this matter, but just as Zhu Ji was about to reveal it, Zhao Mu came and interrupted the conversation. In any case, just leave it to me.”

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief, and regained their hope.

Teng Yi listened coldly, no change of expression on his face at all, giving one the impression of a hero with deep resolution.

Tao Fang complimented, "Shaolong is indeed smarter than others, making use of Zhao Ya to trick the King of Zhao and Zhao Mu. Seems that no matter what out of the ordinary things we do for the next 10 days, they will not interfere."

Master Wu nodded his head, "If we do not have Shaolong, we will surely fail terribly this time." He turned towards his son and said, "Is the livestock farm in Qin almost ready?"

Everyone was surprised, only now did they realize that Wu Yingyuan had gone to the state of Qin to make arrangements.

Wu Yingyuan replied, "I've chosen 4 places to run the farm and have already sent experienced hands to deal with it 2 years ago and now it's beginning to have some semblance of a farm and just about able to contain the resources and animals that we will be moving there. Humph! I really feel like seeing with my own eyes the expression of that muddleheaded ruler King Xiaocheng's face after we leave."

Xiang Shaolong can't help but ask, "There are so many animals in the farm and along the way there will be roadblocks set up by the Zhao soldiers, how will we leave?"

Wu Yingyuan said with a smile, "We will not move even a strand of grass in this farm, what we're moving are the few farms near the Qin border. The past few years we've been using the excuse that we're going to deal against the Qins to slowly expand our farms near that area and the best animals are also sent there."

Tao Fang continued, “On the surface the Zhaos are still maintaining cordial relationships with the Wu family and the soldiers at the borders do not know the situation here at all. As long as the Qins agree, even if we move all the animals, it won’t pose any difficulty at all. Besides, we’re now only sending over the best animals to use as stud stock.”

Wu Zhuo said, “Many of the Zhao soldiers at the border are Wu family disciples I secretly planted there whose names have been changed, so it’s a lot easier to work.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly impressed. It turned out that in order to save Ying Zheng and his mother, Wu Yingyuan has started working on it a few years ago, that’s why everything can move at such a breeze now.

Teng Yi asked nonchalantly, “There won’t be any animals left behind for the Zhaos?”

Master Wu replied calmly, “Of course!”

Xiang Shaolong can’t bear to think of the scene where the farms will be filled with the corpses of cows and horses, but they have no choice but to do this.

He changed the topic, “The most important thing now is how many days we can defend the fortress, the longer we withstand them the better the chance of us escaping.”

Teng Yi and Tao Fang were just informed about the secret tunnel so they understood his meaning.

Because the Zhaos will think that they are trapped in the stockade and will not send anyone to go after them, while Zhu Ji and her son can leave the city via the tunnel. So the longer they can hold the stockade, the further they can escape, to the extent that they may even reach Xianyang before the border guards receive any news.

Wu Zhuo replied, "You can count on me and Teng Yi for this. Within these few days I will secretly move the equipment and men needed to defend the stockade in and hide them well while Brother Teng will be in charge of teaching them the art of defending a city."

Wu Yingyuan told Tao Fang, "Master Tao better transfer those outsiders somewhere else and try to dismiss the unrelated maids and servants. As for the song courtesans, chose the best ones and send them out of the city, but you must pretend to be secretive about all these."

Everyone else, with the exception of Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong, all laughed.

The former because he has seldom smiled since the horrible deaths of his wife and children while Xiang Shaolong is because he thought of Master Wu's decision to perish together with the stockade.

He can't help but utter, "Grandfather..."

Master Wu interrupted, "This matter can only be washed with blood, so that the descendants of the Wu family will never forget their hatred with the Zhaos. Whoever wants to deal with the Wu family will have to pay a terrible price."

He sighed softly and a look of reminiscence shot out from his eyes as he said slowly, “Our forefathers are actually Qin royalty, but because of strife we were forced to end up in Zhao. Depending on our unyielding resolution, we set up a farm in the deserted areas and became the world’s number one livestock farm. Now my descendants are finally returning home while I can only die heroically. That life has turned out this way, what more can a man ask.”

Wu Zhuo was silent while Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang looked miserable.

A look of respect shot out from Teng Yi’s eyes as he said emotionally, “Good man!”

Master Wu smiled and stood up with some trouble, saying “That’s why I am going to enjoy myself to the fullest for the next few days, do not bother me if there’s nothing important.”

He chortled and under the looks of everyone present, left the room humming a tune.

Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong walked side-by-side back to the inner hall and asked, “What do you plan to do with Qian’er?”

Xiang Shaolong knows that he dotes on this pretty princess and was worried that he will abandon her so he assured him, “I will bring her along no matter what.”

Teng Yi was assured and turned around to look for Wu Zhuo.

That evening, Master Wu held a secret wedding ceremony for Xiang Shaolong and Wu Tingfang and at the same time accepted Ting Fangshi as his mistress, so that both now have a formal status.

That night Xiang Shaolong infiltrated the Hostage Residence with Jing Jun again.

Xiang Shaolong was familiar with the place and avoided the guards on patrol, coming to Zhu Ji's bedchamber. The 2 of them hid on the bed and talked secretly.

Zhu Ji's pretty face is on the same pillow as him, her body pressed tightly against him. Because she is lying on her side, sounds of her alluring breathing drifted into his ears following her breaths and that sort of pull is something no man can resist.

Luckily Xiang Shaolong's eyes were staring straight ahead at the top of the curtained bed or else once he sees her eyes, he will definitely not be able to control himself and do something that he should not have.

In this era where men holds power, women all knows how to use their natural charms to control men. Zhu Ji is exactly one of the best in this area. Or else King Zhuangxiang won't be pining away for her and intelligent men like the bisexual Zhao Mu and Guo Kai won't be enamored with her at the same time.

Zhu Ji did not talk about business first and instead asked, "You have not fallen for that slut Zhao Ya?"

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that women are women after all. Time is precious yet Zhu Ji has the inclination to talk about such gossip, so he can only accede to her and asked, “Are you familiar with her?”

Zhu Ji answered unhappily, “Zhao Mu used to bring her to my place in the past, do you consider that familiar?”

Xiang Shaolong remembered that Zhao Ya once hinted that she has something going on with that fake Ying Zheng, so it seems that it's under Zhao Mu's instructions that she was doing such ridiculous things. He felt a wave of nausea and at the same time felt as if he has been released, because he no longer need to be responsible for Zhao Ya relationship-wise.

Zhu Ji suddenly laughed lightly and said smugly, “Zhao Mu may be wily, but he is definitely not our match. You should know how to make good use of this s.lut!”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought her formidable, she was able to see through his plans immediately. He took a deep breath and said, “If the plan succeeds, it'll really be all thanks to her help.” He can't help but ask, “Lady! Where exactly is your son?”

Zhu Ji replied, “First tell me your plan, I can only tell you after I decide if it's viable.”

After going through so many experiences, Xiang Shaolong has learnt not to reveal everything. He told her the gist of the plan but omitted the most important part about the secret tunnel in the Wu family and changed the

escape route to be from the west of the city.

Zhu Ji is already very satisfied and kissed his cheek gently, her slender hand caressing his broad chest and asked flirtatiously, “Your waist is so hard, what is tied around there?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “It’s equipment that can make me fly over walls and needles that can kill silently.”

Zhu Ji’s expression changed, “Does Zhao Ya know you have such abilities?”

Xiang Shaolong thought carefully and shook his head, “Although she has seen them before, I’ve never explained how they are used. Besides it seems that she is still hoping that I can escape alone and should not have told Zhao Mu about it.”

Zhu Ji heaved a sigh of relief and whispered in his ear, “We cannot just depend on luck. Can you bring me some strong drugs tomorrow, if need be, I want to think of a way to slip out myself.”

Xiang Shaolong is beginning to think that this woman is not simple at all and asked with a furrowed brow, “Even if we can drug the maids who are guarding you, we won’t be able to pass the guards. You must not believe Guo Kai, he’s just lying to get your body.”

Zhu Ji guffawed, “Only a fool would believe him. The person I want to drug is him. This is the only route to escape after I pondered on this problem day and night over the last 10 years. I want to drug him because his build and

weight is about the same as me. I only need to prop my shoes higher and tie something like what you have in my clothes.”

She continued with a sigh, “Hai! If I don’t find something to do, I’d go crazy being locked up like this.” She paused and continued in a sharp voice that sounded exactly like Guo Kai, “That’s why I imitated his way of talking and actions everyday. If not for the fact that I know I won’t be able to go far, or else I would have slipped away long ago.”

Xiang Shaolong was bowled over and complimented her sincerely, “You did a really great imitation.”

Footsteps were heard from outside the door and Xiang Shaolong hurriedly hid in the secret compartment.

The maids opened the door and came into the room, lifting up the curtains on the bed and only left after seeing Zhu Ji who was pretending to be asleep.

Xiang Shaolong squeezed out.

Zhu Ji leaned over again and hugged him, saying, “There’s a man under Buwei who is adept in the skill of disguise...”

Xiang Shaolong interrupted her, “You’re referring to Xiao Yuetan, I just met him!”

Zhu Ji exclaimed happily, “Only now do I trust you wholeheartedly. All right! I’ll tell you, although I do not know the skill of disguise, but I had learnt some

tricks from him in the past out in interest. When I am feeling bored everyday I will try to think of a way to disguise myself as Guo Kai. I'm confident that unless I meet someone familiar, or else no one will be able to tell."

Xiang Shaolong sighed secretly, from this one can tell how much Zhu Ji yearns to leave this cage, and he can also see her fierce determination during such dire situation.

Zhu Ji said, "Most importantly you must bring me the drugs. Man is strange, regardless of committing good or bad deeds, once things get started it'll be difficult to control, so sooner or later Zhao Ya will betray you totally. With Zhao Mu's cautious and suspicious nature, he will certainly increase the number of people guarding this place."

Xiang Shaolong agreed, "Now that you've said this, I too feel a bad omen. If Zhao Mu finds out that I have the ability to move about over high places, he will certainly pinpoint on this area and deal with it." He then sat up.

Zhu Ji asked in alarm, "What are you doing?"

Xiang Shaolong did not reply her but moved to the side of the window and looked out, and it happened that a team of patrol just walked past. After they left, he made a signal to Jing Jun who was outside and in a short while, that lad slipped in swiftly through the window like a civet cat.

After Xiang Shaolong instructed him to return to the Wu family to take the drugs and saw him leaving safely, he went back to the bed.

Zhu Ji stared at him with her large eyes and said, "So you actually have someone who is so highly skilled helping you, no wonder Zhao Mu is so wary of you."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Lady, you better tell me quickly the matter regarding the Crown Prince!"

Zhu Ji said languidly, "Why the anxiety? You still have to wait for him to take the thing here before you leave. You don't even know how torturous it is for me to keep everything to myself and it's not easy for me to find someone like you to talk to."

Xiang Shaolong felt both anger and humor over this and cajoled her, "Take it that I beg of you?"

Zhu Ji was ecstatic and she used her wiles and asked gently, "Shaolong! Will you kiss me?"

Xiang Shaolong had no choice but to turn his head around only to see her enigmatic and flirtatious eyes staring at him unwaveringly.

Their eyes locked for a moment and Zhu Ji took the initiative to kiss his lips, her slender body lightly moving against his.

Waves of giddiness swept over his body and Xiang Shaolong's lust was immediately aroused uncontrollably.

Zhu Ji's fragrant lips moved apart a little and she said with a light laugh, "And

I thought you're a weirdo who will not be moved, so it turns out that you're no different from other men."

Xiang Shaolong felt irritation and because of this his attention was diverted and he suppressed his lust while exclaiming angrily, "Lady!"

Zhu Ji extended 2 fingers and pressed on his mouth, and as if cajoling a kid, said, "Don't be angry, I sincerely want to be close to you!"

Just when Xiang Shaolong could do nothing about her, Zhu Ji said with a serious tone, "At that time in order to avoid being seen, Buwei and my husband did not bring me with them. I had just given birth to a son then and he was not even a month old. After they left, I knew the situation is not right and the Zhaos may very well kill Zheng'er to appease their anger so that night I ordered my servant to go find another baby to take Zheng'er's place."

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened, "So that's how the fake Ying Zheng came about."

Zhu Ji said with worry, "Things done in a hurry will certainly have loopholes. We can't find a baby around the same age at such short notice so we could only pay a large sum of money to buy a 3 year old kid to replace him. Luckily at that time no one thought highly of my husband and they don't even know if he has children. That night when Zhao Mu found out that Lu Buwei and my husband had left, he sentenced all the maids and servants to death in fury, leaving only me and my fake son but his suspicions were not aroused at all."

Only now did Xiang Shaolong understand, no wonder Ying Zheng's age is

different from the history books, so the real situation is so twisted.

The battle of Changping happened during 260BC, and he has been here for a few years and now it is 249BC, a difference of 11 years.

If Emperor Qin was born in Zhao after the defeat of Changping, and with the difficulty in news being passed during this ancient era, the news may have been delayed by one year. Therefore Ying Zheng should be born at the beginning of the year, the year after the defeat at Changping, and he ascended the throne on 246BC, which is only 3 years away from now. Hence he should be 13 years old by then, which proves that the history books were correct.

He's so stupid not to have guessed that this Ying Zheng is a fake one.

The things that he could not figure out in the past immediately became logical.

This is more reasonable, with Emperor Qin's intellect and bravery, how can he be a useless person.

Zhu Ji took out from within her clothes an exquisite jade piece with a unique design, with a phoenix carved on it. She removed it and somberly pressed it into Xiang Shaolong's hand and used his palm to cover it up, her 2 hands grabbing his hardened fists tightly and said gently, "The real Zheng'er has been sent to a poor family in Handan who had just lost 2 sons in the defeat of Changping, and it's been agreed that in future this jade piece will be used to identify each other. Zheng'er has the same jade piece hung around his neck.

This has a phoenix carved on it while his has a dragon carved on it.”

Xiang Shaolong asked, “Does that couple know about the Crown Prince’s background?”

Zhu Ji’s eyes revealed both joy and worry and she was so nervous her breathing quickened as she breathed out, “Of course we can’t let them know, we just told them he’s an illegitimate son borne by a girl from a rich family. At that time I didn’t expect to be put under house arrest immediately and the servant who knew about the matter has been killed. Therefore I only have the opportunity to tell you this matter when you came today. Heavens! You must find him for me, or else I won’t want to live either.”

Xiang Shaolong can feel the remaining body warmth of Zhu Ji from the jade piece in his hands and he said confidently, “I can guarantee with my head, I will certainly find him.”

Of course he is confident, or else history would not have ended up thus.

Zhu Ji whimpered, “Don’t try to cajole me.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “I am someone with special abilities, my intuition will certainly not go wrong.”

Zhu Ji looked at him doubtfully for a moment before moving to his ears and telling him the secret in her heart, the name and address of the person who took in her son.

Xiang Shaolong memorized it.

There was a soft sound at the window, Jing Jun has returned and he was carrying a big bag of drugs and came grinning to the curtain. He was eyeing Zhu Ji up and down and was immediately dumbfounded and forgot to speak.

Zhu Ji giggled and naturally she looked alluring.

Xiang Shaolong said with a reprimanding tone, "Xiao Jun!"

Only then did Jing Jun's senses return and he said, "This is a very strong drug, just a little can knock a person out for a day and even cold water won't rouse him. There's enough here to knock out over a hundred people."

They could hear hoof beats coming nearer from afar.

Zhu Ji and Xiang Shaolong were both stunned and knows that Zhu Ji has indeed made the correct guess about Zhao Ya.

Xiang Shaolong knows that not only is Zhao Ya sinking deeper and deeper, but she has been controlled by Zhao Mu again, or else Zhao Mu won't have sent people here to increase defenses in the middle of the night. Obviously Zhao Ya has revealed to Zhao Mu in bed regarding his ability.

After he hurriedly made an agreement with Zhu Ji on the time and place for escape, the 2 of them left swiftly.

They've just climbed over the wall when the guards came rushing over from

where the fake Ying Zheng stayed to start a new defense formation.

From this moment on, this resilient mother of Emperor Qin, will have to use her own strength and intellect to escape.

Chapter 9

The Big Exchange

Early the next morning, an impatient Xiang Shaolong slipped quietly into the streets and deliberately went a big round before coming to where the poor lived in at the west of the city.

Although it's where the poor lived, their lives are not that bad, only their houses were a little run down and the fallen walls not repaired! Most of the people here used to be farmers but the wars destroyed their farms and hence they have no choice but to find work in the city.

He followed the address and came at last to the South Alley which Zhu Ji told him.

At this time he can't help but feel nervous as he grabbed a passerby and asked, "Where is Zhang Li's house?"

That person saw that he looked respectable and pointed to a fenced up house at the end of the alley and said, "That is his house!" He seemed to have some words which he found difficult to say, but he just shook his head, sighed and left.

Xiang Shaolong was not concerned at all and his mood became more relaxed. He secretly thought that this should be right, and walked over. He went to the door and shouted, "Zhang Li! Zhang Li!"

A forty over year old average looking woman stuck her head out and eyed Xiang Shaolong suspiciously for a moment before asking, "Who is looking for Zhang Li?"

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, "You must be Madam Zhang!" He took out the jade piece and showed it to her.

With a 'bang', Madam Zhang slammed the door close as if she has seen a ghost.

Xiang Shaolong was totally dumbfounded by her reaction and stared at the closed wooden door like a retard.

In a short while an argument between a man and a woman can be heard from inside.

Xiang Shaolong now understood. Naturally they are unwilling to return a child whom they have raised for 10 years, so he can only compensate them well with money.

He reached out and lightly knocked on the brass ring on the door.

After a pause the door opened and a man stood next to the door and said with lowered head, "Sir, please come in."

Xiang Shaolong saw that he looked honest and secretly complimented Zhu Ji's subordinate for knowing how to choose a person rightly.

He stepped into the house and saw that woman sitting at a corner weeping. A cloud of gloom hung in the house and there's no liveliness in it at all.

He did not even hear any child's voice or clothing and items.

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brow and asked, "Where's the child?"

The woman sobbed even more uncontrollably.

Zhang Li's eyes reddened as he said painfully, "Dead!"

That word sounded thunderous and made Xiang Shaolong's body tremble. He almost had an heart attack as he exclaimed in shock, "How did he die?"

Zhang Li said miserably, "Few years ago when the Yans attacked Handan, all children above the age of 13 were conscripted to defend the city, and he was killed by one of the random arrows shot by the Yans. Although we took your money, we could not protect the child, just kill us! There's no meaning living on anyway."

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed hoarsely, "But he wasn't even 10 years old last year!" He remembered the behavior of the passerby earlier and now understood that he was feeling sorry that they have lost their son.

Zhang Li replied, "We can only blame that he's a lot bigger built than 13 year old kids. While he was outside playing one day, he was captured by passing soldiers."

Xiang Shaolong collapsed onto a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Heavens! Emperor Qin is actually dead, what should he do?

No! This is impossible, this couple must be lying. But looking at their expressions, he knows that this is the truth, especially when there's a new memorial tablet placed on a table on one side of the wall.

Zhang Li took out a jade piece and handed it to him, "This was taken from his body. He's buried in out back garden, would Sir want to take a look?"

Xiang Shaolong removed his hands and his eyes fell on the jade piece.

A ridiculous yet bold idea came uncontrollably to him.

Xiang Shaolong went to Lady Ya's residence and as expected, Zhao Ya has not returned.

There are more unfamiliar faces in the residence. He did not see any of those whom he is familiar with like Zhao Da and the rest. Amongst the maids, with the exception of Xiao Zhao and Xiao Mei, the rest have all been transferred away.

Xiang Shaolong knows that Zhao Ya will certainly have a very good excuse for all these arrangements, but he still wants to hear her say it personally. The more she lies to him, the more he can turn his love for her into hatred.

Zhao Pan was practicing his swordplay alone in the back garden with deep

concentration but once Xiang Shaolong stepped into the garden, he could detect him and he ran forward with his sword as if he has seen the only family he has in the world.

Xiang Shaolong pulled out the sword named Blood Wave which Li Mu gave him and shouted, “Lad, look out for the sword!”

Zhao Pan’s eyes gleamed as he slashed forward with his sword.

Xiang Shaolong stood easily with his sword and said with a stern expression, “Do you think this is a game? Be more vicious!”

Zhao Pan roared as he executed the Mohist swordplay and slashed and stabbed at Xiang Shaolong, making a total of 7 attacks.

When he reached the 7th stance, he was finally disarmed by the reverberations mainly because he is smaller sized and not as strong.

Zhao Pan looked totally dejected and extremely unhappy over his defeat but there’s nothing he can do.

Xiang Shaolong picked up the long sword for him and took him to the tiny bridge in the middle of the garden. They sat on the low barrier and he said seriously, “Xiao Pan! Do you really have the perseverance to eliminate all difficulties and avenge your mother?”

Zhao Pan nodded his head with resolution, “No matter what, I must kill Zhao Mu and the King.”

Xiang Shaolong asked solemnly, “Aren’t you good friends with the Crown Prince?”

Zhao Pan said unhappily, “He’s never been my friend, he only knows how to use his position to bully me. Ever since Mother got to know you, he’s been going around telling everyone that Mother is a s.lut. If it’s possible, I want to kill him as well.” He suddenly added, “But even if I become as formidable as Teacher, I still won’t be able to kill them, or else Teacher would have killed them long ago.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly surprised at his astute observation and said with a smile, “You want revenge, I want revenge as well. Why not we split duties, I will deal with Zhao Mu while you will deal with that muddle headed ruler King Xiaocheng, how about that?”

Zhao Pan did not expect Xiang Shaolong to think so highly of him and he stared at him with huge eyes, looking morosely at his only ‘family’.

Xiang Shaolong said, “Now I am going to tell you a very important thing, if you really have the determination to avenge your mother’s humiliation, then instruct me to go ahead. Otherwise you are never to reveal anything about this at all, not even to Princess Qian and Lady Ya.”

Zhao Pan jumped up, kneeled on the ground and kowtowed to him 3 times, his eyes reddened as he said, “As long as I can avenge Mother, I am willing to do anything.”

Xiang Shaolong said quietly, “Stand up!”

Zhao Pan stood up, his eyes filled with the look of extreme curiosity.

Xiang Shaolong smiled a little and continued, “I want you to become Emperor Qin who unifies the 6 states!”

Zhao Pan was stunned for a moment before asking quizzically, “What is Emperor Qin?”

By the time Zhao Ya came into the garden, Xiang Shaolong has just hung the jade piece on Zhao Pan’s neck.

From this moment onwards, he is the heir to the Qin throne Ying Zheng.

Zhao Pan looked both shocked and overjoyed, but the look in his eyes was unwavering, filled with a determination which was never there before.

No one can understand better than him, a child who grew up in the Palace, how rare this chance can be.

And only by becoming the ruler of the strongest state in the world can he have the ability to kill the King of Zhao and avenge his Mother Lady Ni.

Not only does he hate the King of Zhao, but also every other Zhao who just stood by the side and gave him the cold shoulder.

Now the only person he trusts totally is Xiang Shaolong.

Zhao Ya came towards them with a smile and complimented, “I’ve never

seen Xiao Pan so hardworking before.”

Xiang Shaolong gave a look to Zhao Pan and the latter slipped off obediently.

Zhao Ya tried to force a smile on a face, but her countenance was pale and tired, obviously she did not have a good night.

Xiang Shaolong asked deliberately, “Ya’er are you feeling unwell?”

Zhao Ya stammered slightly, “No! Nothing much. I was going around these few days trying to gather information for you and am so tired.”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows as he asked, “Why are there so many unfamiliar faces here now, where has Zhao Da and the rest gone?”

Zhao Ya seems to have prepared an answer long ago and said nonchalantly, “I had them transferred to my residence in the Palace. Without their help, it’s inconvenient for me to work in the Palace.”

She was afraid that he would pursue the topic so she changed the subject, “How is the plan progressing? Have you contacted Ying Zheng?”

Xiang Shaolong answered dejectedly, “It seems that other than a direct attack, there is no other way. But the Wu family’s warriors can fight one against ten, so my plan will definitely succeed. Zhao Mu and King Xiaocheng can forget about living past the Farmers’ Festival.”

Zhao Ya lowered her pretty face, unable to hide the pain and uncertainty in

her expression.

Xiang Shaolong thought secretly: let me give you another chance, and asked with concern, "Ya'er you seem very troubled these few days. Why don't you say what is troubling you so that I can share your problems, there is nothing that cannot be solved."

Zhao Ya was stunned, "Nothing is troubling me, I'm just a little scared!"

She gathered up a smile and collected her spirits and said, "Shaolong you better tell me the details of your plan on that day so that Third Princess and I can work with you, in that way we can avoid any last minute mishaps."

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, "No need to be so anxious, I will tell you the detailed arrangement in a few days, because there are some areas which we still have not settled on." He secretly sighed and understood that Zhao Ya is really going all the way out to betray him.

Zhao Ya suddenly asked, "Shaolong! Have you heard any rumors about me recently?"

Xiang Shaolong said lightly, "You're referring to Qi Yu's matter! How can it be? I absolutely trust my good Ya'er, and understand that you are pretending to be on their side so that the King of Zhao will not suspect us."

Zhao Ya's expression started to look unnatural, as if she's a little afraid to be alone with Xiang Shaolong, and said, "Aren't you going to see your beautiful princess?"

Xiang Shaolong stood up suavely.

Zhao Ya looked at his expression which is full of heroic air morosely, her eyes looking totally lost.

Xiang Shaolong gave a cold snort in his heart, and once he thought of the fact that later one, she will understand that he has been lying to her, and he felt an extreme satisfaction rising in his heart.

The next few days, everyone in the Wu family were getting ready. Men and supplies we constantly streaming in secretly from the tunnel into the stockade.

Xiang Shaolong personally trained those 77 members of the Wu family's special task force. The methods he used overwhelmed even Teng Yi, who is well versed in the art of warfare, and how could he have known that these are the training methods from the 21st century.

He also visited Xiao Pan frequently and taught him how to pretend to be the Ying Zheng who has lived with a poor family for 10 years and in the end, it was Xiao Pan who told him the things he has thought of instead.

Xiang Shaolong saw how smart and obedient he is and was greatly assured.

Unconsciously, it is now only 3 days away from the Farmers' Festival.

The situation became tense.

The most worrying thing for Xiang Shaolong now is Zhu Ji. If she cannot get out, they will really have to invade Hostage Residence by force. Without her, Xiao Pan will not be able to become Ying Zheng.

That's why they have another back up plan.

That afternoon, Xiao Yuetan who has been gone for 7 days finally returned.

After entering the secret room, Xiao Yuetan's attitude is vastly different and said apologetically to Wu Yingyuan and Xiang Shaolong, "Firstly! Master Tu asked that I apologize to you first, because we had other selfish plans then and the words I used were not the whole truth. But I guarantee that from now on, we will sincerely co-operate with all of you."

To Wu Yingyuan it is like a dream and he doesn't know what has Xiang Shaolong done to make this person's attitude change so drastically.

However Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled and knows that this Tu Xian is a courageous and wise person and only then will it be possible for the plan to succeed.

Xiao Yuetan said, "Luckily Xiaolong tipped us off, or else Master Tu may have been captured by the Zhaos."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "How many of your men are here?"

Xiao Yuetan replied, "There are 30 men who came into the city with me and they are all top notch fighters." He paused and continued, "There are 120

men with Master Tu and they are the most elite among his men.”

Xiang Shaolong said, “Mister Xiao better order all those who have entered the city to come to the Wu residence.”

Xiao Yuetan was stunned and asked, “Is Shaolong thinking of fighting head on with the Zhao?”

Xiang Shaolong replied with a smile, “It may be that, but it may not be that too. Please allow me to keep you in suspense first, I will reveal the whole plan the day after. This matter is too important and I hope you will understand.”

Xiao Yuetan smiled, “Shaolong is so confident, I am even more assured instead. Master Tu is now hiding in a dense forest outside the city near the hills, quietly waiting for us to send the Crown Prince and Lady out.”

Wu Yingyuan laughed, “Mister is really formidable, those few song courtesans who had served you were all pining for you. Just a word from you and we will send them to your residence in Xianyang...”

Xiao Yuetan looked overjoyed and replied, “Everyone says that the Wu family is generous and you indeed live up to your reputation. I am definitely making you my friends.”

Xiang Shaolong took his leave and on the way bumped into Jing Jun who came to look for him. It turns out that Teng Yi had something to discuss with him.

They went to a small building near the city walls which has now become their temporary command center. Teng and Wu were studying the detailed map of the Hostage Residence.

Xiang Shaolong asked quizzically, "Where did you get such good stuff?"

Teng Yi said smugly, "I drew it. I just have to see it once and will be able to memorize and write it out."

Xiang Shaolong was greatly surprised and did not expect Teng Yi to have such amazing memory and excellent drawing skills. After complimenting him, he continued, "I hope we don't have to use the backup plan of invading the Hostage Residence by force. Otherwise even if we succeed, we will suffer heavy casualties as well."

Teng and Ma nodded their heads at the same time, obviously they have some fear and reservations about attacking the Hostage Residence.

Jing Jun said, "If we were to successfully attack the Hostage Residence, it is indeed an extremely difficult task. But if we only need to rescue Zhu Ji, the situation will be totally different. I just have to lead those 'Elite Army'." He then revealed his plan, which sounded totally reasonable.

The other 3 were astounded and all changed their impressions of him.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this lad is really born to be in the special task force, even better than him, and said seriously, "From now on you will be the leader of the Elite Army. It's best that you forge good relations with

them so that when you work together in future, there will be no problems.”

Jing Jun was ecstatic. While others were overwhelmed with duties, he had nothing to do but just be a runner for Teng Yi. Now that he’s suddenly the leader of the Elite Army, naturally he is overjoyed.

With a shout, he went looking for his subordinates.

Wu Zhuo shook his head with a wry smile. Without his orders, who would listen to the commands of a young and inexperienced lad.

Teng Yi closed his eyes and recollected his thoughts for a moment, then opened his eyes and said, “I still worry about Qian’er.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Logically speaking, they won’t do anything to Qian’er before the Farmers’ Festival in case our suspicions are aroused.”

Teng Yi said, “In the eyes of the King of Zhao, Qian’er has committed an unforgivable crime. I’m afraid he will sentence her to death on that day and we will live to regret it.”

Now that he’s said that, Xiang Shaolong is worried about Xiao Pan as well. With the King of Zhao’s ruthlessness, maybe he will not let a child off as well and he asked in alarm, “What should we do then?”

Zhao Mu has forced Zhao Ya to transfer all her own people away, on one hand his people can keep an eye on Lady Ya so that she will not dare to betray him, and at the same time they can control Zhao Qian’s life and death.

Xiang Shaolong's concern is clouding his thinking and his brains is totally not working, unable to think of any way that can change this terrible situation. The biggest problem is that they can only wait until the last moment to save Zhao Qian.

Teng Yi said, "If the King of Zhao summoned Zhao Qian back into the Palace a day earlier, there will be nothing we can do at all."

Although it is now winter, Xiang Shaolong was sweating as he exclaimed, "I have not thought of that!"

Teng Yi said calmly, "Just leave this matter to me. Zhao Mu is still not aware that we have seen through his evil plans so he won't send a huge army to keep an eye on Lady Ya's residence. Even if he were to send people to escort Zhao Qian back to the Palace, he won't use so many manpower too. As long as we send men to keep an eye on Lady Ya's residence round the clock, we can act according to circumstances and need not worry about any mishaps."

Xiang Shaolong is the only one who knows what the problem is, and it is Xiao Pan. He is determined not to tell anyone about Xiao Pan impersonating Ying Zheng. In future only he, Zhao Qian, Wu Tingfang and a limited number of people will know of this, no one else will know Xiao Pan's real identity.

Teng Yi said, "What I fear is that the King of Zhao would be so ruthless and sentence his daughter to death. This is really problematic."

Xiang Shaolong hardened his resolve and said, "Maybe I will have to do it the hard way, I will pressurize Zhao Ya to let me bring Qian'er here. Her only way

is to seek the King's advice. If he really has the intention of killing his daughter, he won't mind her coming to the Wu family, and can even accuse us of one more crime, kidnapping the princess. By then they will have even more reason to back them up."

Teng Yi said, "Logically speaking you should take Zhao Ya along as well. Won't she be suspicious?"

Xiang Shaolong also felt that this plan is not really workable and just as he was worrying over it, Lady Ya sent someone to invite him over to her residence.

Xiang Shaolong went on his way hurriedly, knowing fully well that it is time to give Zhao Ya all the fake cards.

Chapter 10

Going along with the mistake

Xiang Shaolong met Zhao Ya at the quiet inner hall.

It was a sunny day, the sun who has not shown his face for many days shone gently on the silvery white world.

This time Xiang Shaolong did not even see Xiao Zhao and Xiao Mei, it seems that everyone in the whole residence has been changed with Zhao Mu's men.

Zhao Ya was dressed in yellow and she seemed to be in better spirits but it still could not hide her sad and tired face. There is a kind of heartbreaking, lonesome beauty, which revealed the torture and dilemma in her heart.

But Xiang Shaolong has no pity for her at all. He only thought that she deserves it.

After they were seated and the maid who served tea left, Zhao Ya said quietly, "How are things progressing?"

Xiang Shaolong gave a small smile and replied, "Quite smoothly. Do you have any new information on your side, did Zhao Mu hear of anything at all?"

Zhao Ya shook her head, "Imperial Brother and Zhao Mu's attention are all placed on the war with the Yans, and has no time to bother about other

matters for the moment.” She paused and continued, “Instead Empress Jing is urging you to strike quickly and wants me to tell you that Imperial Brother is very unhappy because you submitted the document together with Li Mu and it’s quite possible that he will deal with you and the Wu family after the Farmers’ Festival.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that they are trying to make him more determined to strike. Zhao Ya, you’re really hardworking.

Zhao Ya saw that he was quiet and asked, “Have you made contact with Lu Buwei and the rest? If there’s no one from Qin to help, how are we going to send Zhu Ji and her son back to Xianyang?”

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be troubled and said, “We’ve made contact long ago. They sent Tu Xian and his men over first but they still do not trust us. They only said that if we can get Zhu Ji and her son out of the city, then we are to meet them at Magu Hill west of the city.”

How is Zhao Ya supposed to know this is all nonsense so her pretty eyes brightened and she pressed on, “There’s only 2 days left, is the secret tunnel out of the city ready?”

Xiang Shaolong suddenly had a bright idea and said, “Everything is ready.” He continued with an earnest voice, “To me, you and Qian’er are more important than Zhu Ji and her son, so I’ve decided to send you, Qian’er and Xiao Pan out of the city first before I activate the attack on your Imperial Brother and the Hostage Residence. Otherwise I’d rather cancel the whole plan.”

Zhao Ya's delicate body shook as she lowered her head and said, "Are we really that important?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing to himself as he replied, "What joy do I have left if I lose all of you. According to past experiences, your Imperial Brother's troops will leave the city the day after at the hour of Chen (between 7am to 9am). I will wait for you at the back door a little earlier, around the hour of Mao (between 5am to 7am). If everything is appropriate, I'll immediately send someone to send all of you to the west of the city and after I've kidnapped Zhu Ji and her son, I will meet up with you and leave the city together via the secret tunnel."

Zhao Ya asked, "Who is in charge of the ambush outside the city?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Of course Wu Zhuo will be in charge. When the troops pass by the tall grassland, our men who are already in hiding in pre-dug ditches will shoot arrows when they are caught unprepared and they will be unable to react. This plan can be considered flawless."

Zhao Ya's lips quivered slightly and with a voice as soft as an insect buzzing, said, "All right! At that time I, Third Princess and Xiao Pan will slip out to meet up with you."

Xiang Shaolong saw that he has reached his aim and went to look for Zhao Qian. Zhao Ya used the excuse that she's returning to the Palace to report to Empress Jing and left the residence. However Xiang Shaolong of course knows that she is going to report the latest situation to the King of Zhao.

Naturally Zhao Qian is overjoyed at seeing him, but also worried that he won't be able to win against the King of Zhao and Zhao Mu.

Xiang Shaolong hugged her, whispering sweet nothings to her and at the same time telling her about the plan to change Xiao Pan into Ying Zheng.

The expression on Zhao Qian's pretty face changed, not knowing whether to feel scared or excited as breathed out, "No wonder Xiao Pan has been behaving strangely these few days, talking to himself. I was so worried that he has lost his senses because he missed his mother too much yet I dare not tell you for fear that you will be distracted."

Xiang Shaolong said, "Besides you and Tingfang, no one else knows his real identity, so under no circumstances must you reveal the truth of this matter."

Zhao Qian replied, "I understand!"

To assure her, Xiang Shaolong told her what he said to Zhao Ya earlier and further discussed how they could help Xiao Pan disguise before he returned to the Wu family's stockade.

The next day Xiang Shaolong went back to Zhao Ya's residence to look for her and to test her.

As expected, Zhao Ya has no objections to this arrangement.

Standing from Zhao Mu's viewpoint, Xiang Shaolong and the Wu family is just toying within his palms, and there's no way they can escape from his hands.

That's why he will never let go of this opportunity that seems heaven bestowed to totally eliminate Xiang Shaolong and all of the Wu family's power in one fell swoop.

Xiang Shaolong smiled and said, "Kids are more easily frightened, I'd like to take Xiao Pan away first, does Ya'er have any thoughts about this?"

Why on earth would Zhao Ya bother about an unimportant orphan so she nodded her head in agreement.

Xiang Shaolong stood up and was about to leave.

Zhao Ya called out softly, "Shaolong!"

Xiang Shaolong turned around and Zhao Ya threw herself into his arms, her slender hands encircling his neck as she kissed him, using all her strength to portray the pain in her heart.

Although Xiang Shaolong is not at all interested, he had to pretend to lustily savor her tiny mouth.

As their lips parted, Zhao Ya's tears flowed uncontrollably.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be surprised and asked, "Do you have any problems?"

Zhao Ya leaned on his shoulder and wailed, only recollecting herself after a long while and said, "I'm just too happy, that's why I behaved this way."

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing.

Zhao Ya stepped away and wiped her tears as she said, "Go and look for Xiao Pan!"

Xiang Shaolong took Xiao Pan away openly and along the way he changed him into some torn and old clothes he prepared earlier and gave him some instructions before bringing him back to the Wu stockade.

Before that he has already told the needed people that Ying Zheng is actually another person. Those in the Wu family were very excited and the happiest is Xiao Yuetan, because this has changed the entire situation.

They have just stepped through the door when Wu Yingyuan and Xiao Yuetan rushed forward and knelt down, calling out Crown Prince.

Xiao Pan pretended to be overwhelmed and hid behind Xiang Shaolong, and kept crying out that he wants to see his real mother.

Xiang Shaolong told them, "He's still not used to his real identity. Let me bring him to Tingfang for her to look after and we'll talk again after he's seen the Empress."

They did not suspect a thing at all and happily showed this fake prince into the inner mansion.

Time passed, and the day of the Farmers' Festival finally arrived.

Everyone in the stockade woke up before dawn.

All the ladies and children used the excuse that they are going to the farms to celebrate the Farmers' Festival to leave the city. Ting Fangshi and the 4 maids were one of the batch who were sent away.

Wu Tingfang threw a tantrum, insisting on staying by Xiang Shaolong's side. No one could do anything about her so they had to agree.

Inside the stockade, besides the 2000 elite soldiers under Wu Zhuo, there are also 700 odd loyal warriors and 200 odd male and female strong servants, in all about 3000 people. In addition to the high walls and the moat, they are a force not to be reckoned with.

This is also the reason the King of Zhao dare not make any rash moves. It'll be easier to deal with them if they can be lured out of the strong fortress.

After their meal, Xiang Shaolong led Teng Yi, Jing Jun, Xiao Yuetan and his 30 highly skilled men as well as Wu family's 77 elite warriors who are akin to the special task force, out of the city in the dark.

Shortly after they left the stockade, Wu Zhuo led another 50 skilled men and a horse carriage towards Lady Ya's residence.

The sun only came out slowly an hour later, after they reached the back door of Lady Ya's residence.

The back door opened immediately and Zhao Ya and Zhao Qian dashed out

from inside.

Someone opened the carriage door and invited them in.

Zhao Ya followed Zhao Qian into the carriage and only saw Wu Zhuo and 2 other people sitting inside, and he said coldly, “Lady, hello!”

Zhao Ya tried to be calm as she asked, “Where is Shaolong?”

Wu Zhuo signaled the 2 men with his eyes and they immediately struck, tying Zhao Ya up sturdily and even sealed her pretty mouth.

Wu Zhuo passed the pre-prepared clothes to Zhao Qian to let her wear over her clothes and in a short while, she has turned into a man. Unless one looks closely, no one will be able to tell the difference, especially the fake moustache above her lips is so well made.

Zhao Ya’s alarmed and pretty eyes looked at Wu Zhuo, and looked at Zhao Qian who seemed not to care about her and finally realized what is happening. She felt a mixture of shame and regret.

Wu Zhuo looked at her with distaste, “You’re such a stupid and cheap slut, how dare you betray our Master Xiang, you really do not know your own ability.” And he spat at her.

By now the carriage has turned into a small lane, and Wu Zhuo and Zhao Qian dismounted before the carriage continued on its way.

Zhao Ya's tears finally flowed uncontrollably.

Outside the carriage window, snow suddenly fell.

Xiang Shaolong, Teng Yi, Xiao Yuetan etc were hiding in the dense woods opposite the Hostage Residence, concentrating on the happenings at the main door. Everything seems to look normal, there aren't even guards at the door, as if they are not prepared at all.

Xiao Yuetan asked doubtfully, "Would Lady be able to slip out so easily?"

Xiang Shaolong looked at the falling snow and secretly thought that it is indeed written in history books that Zhu Ji and her son arrived at Xianyang safely, so this seemingly impossible matter should happen smoothly. He said with confidence, "Definitely!"

Before he could finish his words, the door to the Hostage Residence opened. First 10 Zhao soldiers on horses came out, followed by an elaborate horse carriage, and another 20 riders followed behind it as they came out to the streets pompously, turned left and rode towards the west.

Everyone was ecstatic and hurried to act.

Jing Jun who was hiding in ambush at that side received the flag signal and immediately gave orders to prepare to attack. 30 elite members swiftly used their pre-prepared ropes and climbed up the trees lining on each side of the road, their bows and arrows aimed at the fast approaching target.

Just as the carriage was about to reach the trees where the men were hiding in ambush, loud hoof beats were suddenly heard from behind and a Zhao soldier on horseback came rushing up, signaling them to stop their advancement.

The leader of the carriage team was startled and ordered his men to stop moving.

Suddenly the sounds of arrows flying were heard and 31 men, including the last Zhao soldier were all killed, with one arrow in each of them as they fell down their horses.

The elite soldiers all jumped down and landed squarely on the horses backs, controlling the alarmed and neighing war horses.

Jing Jun landed lightly on the roof of the carriage and just as he was about to lean upside down and poke his head in to claim his reward from the 'fake Guo Kai' who is in fact Zhu Ji, a man with a sword banged the door open and dashed out.

Everyone were stunned.

This person was dressed in finery and looked to be about 25 to 26 years of age, his height comparable to Xiang Shaolong, his looks extremely handsome and suave. His eyes were so alluring it captivates the soul and he is more than qualified to be the dream man of any woman.

He's also very alert, on seeing the bodies of the Zhao soldiers on the ground

and surrounded by enemies, he roared and wanted to dash into the woods at the side. However, his neck felt tight and he was grabbed around the neck by Jung Jun who was on top of the carriage and the sword in his hand fell to the ground.

2 elite soldiers dashed up and immediately tossed him flat on the ground and at the same time punched and kicked him. He was in such pain that he curled up on the ground.

Xiang Shaolong, Xiao Yuetan and the rest arrived and on seeing such a scene, their expressions changed.

The horse carriage was empty.

Xiang Shaolong stepped on that man's stomach and shouted, "Who are you?"

Jing Jun grabbed his hair and pulled his face up to reveal a pretty toy boy.

That man was so frightened he turned pale as he stammered and pleaded, "Sirs spare my life, I am an envoy from the state of Qi and has no enmity with you."

Xiang Shaolong and Jing Jun looked at each other, they did not expect this Qi Yu to be so useless, cowardly and afraid of death.

Xiao Yuetan exclaimed agitatedly, "What shall we do? Obviously Guo Kai did not go to Lady's room last night."

Everyone were immediately aware that this man in front of them must have tried to go and take advantage of Zhu Ji and only left now after breakfast. Even though Zhu Ji has the ability to entice all men on earth, there is no way she can use her ability because since she wasn't able to get Guo Kai to her bed, of course she has no chance to drug him.

Xiang Shaolong pulled out Blood Wace, pointing it at Qi Yu's eyes and roared, "You want your left eye or right eye?"

Qi Yu stammered, "Spare me! I promise to do anything you ask."

Xiang Shaolong regained his calm and composure and said with a smile, "I only want you to go back to Hostage Residence."

The team rode back to the Hostage Residence in spite of the heavy snow.

Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Yuetan sat in the carriage, holding the shaking Qi Yu as hostage. Looking at this Casanova, they don't know whether to be angry or to laugh.

The door opened and someone called out, "Why has Master Qi returned?"

Under Xiang and Xiao's threatening gestures, Qi Yu called out, "I've left an important document behind and need to take it back from Lady's place."

That guard said, "Master Guo has ordered that no one is allowed into Hostage Residence."

Qi Yu followed what Xiang Shaolong whispered in his ear and said, "This document has something to do with your country's King and is extremely important. I'll be responsible for anything that happens, let me in quickly!"

That guard had no choice but to let him in because of his special status and also because he just came out of the residence earlier.

The accompanying Zhao soldiers are of course Jing Jun and his men in disguise. Firstly, it was snowing heavily and also because these soldiers sent to protect Qi Yu are from a different camp to those guarding the residence so they do not know one another and for the moment no one could detect anything wrong.

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief as the carriage hurriedly arrived at the empty space next to Zhu Ji's residence.

Jing Jun is in charge of staying outside the residence and on seeing the various defense setup in the garden and the ditches for archers, he can't help but heave a sigh of relief, feeling glad that they need not force their way in.

Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Yuetan escorted Qi Yu on his left and right, with 4 more men following them and went into the building. The 4 Zhao soldiers standing guard at the steps recognized Qi Yu and although they saw that he looked pale, they thought it's because he exerted too much 'energy' last night and so did not suspect anything amiss.

2 of the guards followed them into the building.

2 pretty maids were cleaning up the hall and they both smiled and came towards Qi Yu to welcome him once they saw him.

Xiang Shaolong gave a secret signal and the 4 elite soldiers struck at the same time, using the techniques they learnt from Xiang Shaolong to knock the 2 maids and 2 guards out. They immediately tied them up tightly with ropes, stuffed their mouths and dragged them to a corner.

Xiang Shaolong asked Qi Yu frostily, "How many others are there in the house?"

Qi Yu replied obediently, "There are another 5 maids and 2 of them are accompanying Zhu Ji." To stay alive, he is indeed revealing everything that he knows.

Just as the 4 elite soldiers were about to go search, the main door suddenly opened and Guo Kai dashed in and asked Qi Yu unhappily, "Why have Master Envoy come back again, didn't you have enough fun last night?" His tone was filled with jealousy.

Xiang Shaolong knows that he must have heard the news from the fake Ying Zheng and this came over hurriedly to make sarcastic remarks at Qi Yu who has taken his Zhu Ji and felt like laughing.

Qi Yu could only look at him and smile bitterly.

Only now did Guo Kai have the time to look at the people accompanying Qi Yu and when his gaze fell on the coldly sniggering Xiang Shaolong, his

expression changed immediately and before he has the chance to shout, a sword was already at his throat.

Xiang Shaolong asked with a smile, “How have Master Guo been!”

Guo Kai stammered, “You will never be able to escape!”

Xiang Shaolong replied nonchalantly, “Who is escaping?” He deliberately emphasized on the word ‘escaping’.

Xiao Yuetan ordered, “Escort them them.”

2 soldiers went off first to look for the other maids whom they have not captured while Xiang Shaolong and the rest took the 2 of them and went up the second floor to Zhu Ji’s tightly closed room.

Guo Kai was threatened and had no choice but to order the strong maids who were inside guarding Zhu Ji to open the door.

The door opened slightly and Xiang Shaolong forced his way in and knocked the 2 maids unconscious.

Zhu Ji was sitting in a daze in front of the copper mirror, looking unhappy when she suddenly saw a Zhao soldier dash in and hit the maids. Just as she was totally scared stiff, Xiao Yuetan has already dashed forward and knelt on the ground, saying quietly, “Your subordinate Xiao Yuetan was late in saving you, Lady must have suffered!” As she spoke, he was so overcome by emotions that he almost wept.

Xiang Shaolong thought that this person really does know how to act, no wonder Lu Buwei thought so highly of him. He reminded them, “Lady, disguise yourself as Guo Kai quickly.”

Only now did Zhu Ji recognize that it's Xiang Shaolong and she jumped up with joy. She first went to Guo Kai and Qi Yu and gave each of them a slap on the cheek.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought her formidable and at the same time ordered “Bring the 2 of them out first, remove Master Guo’s clothes and then tie him up.”

2 members of their group obeyed the orders and pushed them out of the room.

With Xiao Yuetan’s expert help, when Zhu Ji put on Guo Kai’s signature long beard and wore his official robes and hat, even Xiang Shaolong could not see the difference.

Zhu Ji remembered something and asked, “Where is Zheng’er?”, he voice obviously shaking.

Xiang Shaolong said with a smile, “Fortunately he’s still alive!”

Zhu Ji exclaimed in joy and almost wanted to rush forward to hug and kiss Xiang Shaolong. She turned to Xiao Yuetan and asked, “Does... does he look like his Majesty?”

Xiao Yuetan coughed drily and stole a look at Xiang Shaolong before replying with embarrassment, "Extremely like him, but he looks as good as Lady too."

With such a question and answer, Xiang Shaolong knows immediately that even Zhu Ji herself is not sure who this son of hers belong to. Of course she would never imagine that the son she is about to see is not her own flesh and blood at all. Such a messy affair, who knows how it can be explained.

They dare not stay any longer and walked out of the room.

Guo Kai was tied tightly and when he saw 'himself' walking out from the room, he was so shocked his eyes almost fell out.

Zhu Ji imitated his voice and said, "Kill him for me!"

Guo Kai and Qi Yu's faces immediately paled.

Xiang Shaolong has no wish to kill a defenseless person, so he said laughingly, "Keeping him alive will be even more torturous than killing him."

Zhu Ji rolled her eyes at him and said, "You are a very good man!" and walked downstairs first with a smile.

Xiang Shaolong and the rest have now turned into followers, and escorting Qi Yu, ran after her.

Zhu Ji, disguised as Guo Kai, walked out the main door first and imitating Guo Kai's voice and tone, reprimanded Qi Yu who was following behind, "If you're

not an honored guest from the state of Qi, I would have punished you severely.”

Qi Yu lowered his head, looking as if he has made a great mistake.

As ‘Guo Kai’ continued his reprimands, he went up the horse carriage together with Qi Yu and of course Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Yuetan followed them in.

The horse carriage drove out and arriving at the main gate, the leader of the guards guarding the gate walked over and said, “Master Envoy...”

Zhu Ji interrupted, “I am going out with Master Envoy for a while, all of you guard the doors closely.”

The leader was stunned, “Sir! This place needs you here.”

Zhu Ji said with her most officious air, “I know what to do. You, Chen Gui, are in no position to tell me what to do, open the door quickly!”

The wonderful part is that she even knows the other person’s name.

That leader has no choice but to order the doors to be opened.

The team left Hostage Residence with no trouble at all.

Chapter 11

Army arrives at Stockade

The carriage stopped.

Zhao Ya was just blaming herself and feeling ashamed and regretful when Wu Zhuo went up the horse carriage and released the ropes that bind her.

After she has flexed her limbs, Wu Zhuo ordered her off the carriage.

Zhao Ya recognized this to be a dense forest not far away from the Wu family stockade and just as she was feeling alarmed, a few people appeared from behind the trees and the leader is none other than the person she betrayed, Xiang Shaolong.

Zhao Ya's legs weakened and she collapsed onto the ground, hot tears streaming from her eyes, unable to talk at all.

Xiang Shaolong pushed the person next to him and that person fell next to Zhao Ya as he said icily, “I'll let you adulterous pair become a pair of lovebirds with the same fate.”

Qi Yu stammered, “Don't kill me. Sir, you promised me.”

His cowardice made even Zhao Ya feel despise and loath.

This good looking man seems like an upright and arrogant man usually but it turns out that he is so timid and useless. Especially when he is next to Xiang Shaolong, compared to the latter's heroic air who is not concerned about his own life or death, one can immediately see the difference is as vast as heaven and earth.

At this time even Zhao Ya feels as if she has been blinded by ghosts to have actually fallen for a person like him.

Zhao Ya forced herself to get up and cried piteously, "Shaolong! I've let you down and I'm not good enough for you, kill me!"

Xiang Shaolong looked heavenward and laughed long and hard, saying coldly and unfeelingly, "I do not want a slut like you to sully my precious sword. Remember? I once said that anyone who tries to kill me will have to pay a terrible price. Now I will prove it to you, tell your Imperial Brother and Zhao Mu to come!"

Zhao Ya was stunned, "Weren't you trying to escape?"

Xiang Shaolong smiled mysteriously, "Of course! I will leave immediately. Now that I have Zhu Ji, I can account to the King of Qin."

Sounds of hoof beats could be heard from afar.

Xiang Shaolong revealed a look of surprise and exclaimed, "Oh no! We've been found out."

Wu Zhuo exclaimed frightfully as well, “We have no time to leave, return to the stockade first.”

Zhao Ya looked with tears in her eyes as this man who has once let her tasted real love leave. The pain and regret she felt is like a poisoned snake biting her heart.

Qi Yu who was next to her exclaimed happily, “Look! The Zhao soldiers are here, we are saved!”

Darkness appeared before Zhao Ya’s eyes as she fainted away.

Mission accomplished, Xiang Shaolong and the rest returned triumphantly to the cheers of the Wu family warriors, passed the drawbridge and rushed straight into the stockade.

Master Wu welcomed them personally at the square while Xiao Pan hid behind Wu Tingfang who was dressed in warrior clothes and Zhao Qian, looking as his ‘mother’ Zhu Ji who has changed back into herself entered the stockade and alighted from the carriage.

At this point in time, in Zhu Ji’s eyes, she can only see Xiao Pan. The expression on her face is a touching, ecstatic joy that cannot be hidden as she ran towards Xiao Pan.

Xiao Pan ran out crying as well and threw himself into her arms as mother and son hugged each other and sobbed uncontrollably.

After being separated for 10 years, her flesh and blood whom she has been pining for everyday is not back in her arms. How can she not cry.

And because of this ‘mother’ he thought of his real mother so he sobbed even harder than Zhu Ji and even more honest, the anger that has been simmering inside him flooding out in waves.

Master Wu came to the mother and son and said with much feeling, “Lady, this should be a time of joy.”

The horns were sounded, it means that the Zhao soldiers have already arrived at the stockade.

Zhu Ji lifted her pretty face, her pretty eyes now red and swollen from the crying as she looked at Master Wu and said, “It’s all thanks to Master Wu’s chivalry that us mother and son will have this day. I won’t say any words of gratitude, but as long as us mother and son still have some say in Qin, we will protect the Wu family and ensure you’ll have riches and your descendants will be safe.” She has already learnt that Master Wu is planning to perish with the stockade heroically so that they can escape, so she spoke sincerely from the bottom of her heart, which she seldom does.

With tears shimmering in his eyes, Master Wu laughed loudly, “With Lady’s words, I will be able to smile in the underworld.”

Xiao Yuetan was worried that any delay might bring more problems so he hurried her, “Lady! We have to leave immediately.”

Wu Yingyuan and Jing Jun's elite troops, together with Xiao Yuetan and 30 of his skilled fighters escorted the mother and son, as well as Zhao Qian who was saying her goodbyes sadly to Xiang Shaolong, towards the back of the house. Naturally they are going out of the city via the underground tunnel to meet up with Tu Xian's group.

Xiang Shaolong, Wu Zhuo, Teng Yi and the rest stayed behind because without them, how can they fend off the Zhao army who is more than 10 times bigger than them.

The Zhao army did not invade the stockade immediately but set up defenses outside. The other soldiers in and around Handan kept coming as backup, bringing with them various tools used for invading a fortress. It was only the third day did they complete the whole setup to surround them.

This is exactly what Xiang Shaolong and the rest hoped for, which is to lure and keep the Zhao army here so that Zhu Ji and the rest can escape safely to Xianyang.

The most wonderful part of this whole plan is that the Zhaos think that Ying Zheng is still in their hands so they're not too bothered that others have escaped. They'll be satisfied as long as they can bring the stockade down and kill everyone in the Wu family.

Xiang Shaolong appeared periodically at the walls of the stockade and even made special arrangements for Master Wu and Wu Tingfang to appear there as well so that the Zhaos will not suspect that they have other plans.

On the third night, the warriors who were in charge of keeping an eye on the 4 underground tunnels that leads only to the woods outside the stockade found Zhao soldiers making their way in and hurriedly threw in the burning firewood. With the help of huge fans, they literally burnt a few hundred of the arriving Zhao soldiers alive before sealing the underground passages with rocks.

Naturally the King of Zhao was fuming over this and sent someone over to curse at them beneath the stockade walls early in the morning.

Xiang Shaolong found this very amusing, this is the first time he saw such meaningless ‘cursing’.

Teng Yi did not say a word but took out his specially made strongbow and made the Zhaos dumbfounded by shooting the extremely loud cursing expert off his horse. The distance was more than 800 steps away and the range several feet further than an ordinary bow.

The cheers from the Wu family warriors were deafening.

Whereas the Zhao soldiers were speechless.

Suddenly a person rode over but this time he has learnt his lesson, pulling his horse to a stop when he was a thousand steps away and shouted loudly, “Xiang Shaolong, his Majesty wants to speak with you.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing to himself and thinking that he is not so stupid as to shout and strain his throat just to converse.

Wu Zhuo who was next to him summoned a man over and said with a smile, “It’s good to humiliate him in public!”

Xiang Shaolong understood his meaning and said, “Tell him to go ahead and fart!” He can’t help but laugh after he said this.

Wu Zhuo and Teng Yi couldn’t restrain their smiles and to Teng Yi, this is a rare expression.

That person was stunned for a moment before shouting down, “Go ahead and fart!”

His voice reverberated along the walls.

Those on the Wu family side all chortled and the atmosphere was filled with happiness while the Zhaos were fuming on their side.

The conversation could not proceed and amidst the booming sounds of the war drums, the Zhao army prepared to attack the stockade.

The huge Zhao army surrounding the city, without including the reinforcements, totaled about 30,000 odd men consisting mainly of foot soldiers. This is all the strength the Zhaos could gather within such short notice and the thoroughly surrounded the stockade.

In the chapter ‘Masculine & Feminine Cities’ in Sun Tzu’s Art of War, cities are mainly grouped into 2 types: cities on higher ground or backed against mountains with a good source of water are called ‘Masculine Cities’ and is

extremely difficult to besiege. Cities on lower ground, or are between 2 mountains, or if backed against a valley, and where plants do not flourish are called ‘Feminine Cities’ and as long as one has enough strength, they can be easily overtaken.

The Wu family stockade is the typical ‘Masculine City’. When the city was initially built the King of Zhao was hoping that it would become another important post, which they can defend the city from, but how could he have expected that now it’s a place of betrayal against himself now.

Therefore the Zhaos did not want to attack the stockade rashly so that they will not suffer heavy losses. Initially they thought there would be problems regarding rations and the people in the stockade but now that they saw that the morale in there is so high, they know they’ve made a big mistake.

The generals had initially wanted to have a drawn out siege of the stockade but they did not expect that Xiang Shaolong’s sentence would infuriate the King of Zhao so much that he could not control his temper and ordered a head on attack.

The Wu family is enormously wealthy and the way the stockade was built was according to the strictest standard at that time and is extremely solid. The stockade walls are thick and high, enough to fend off the enemy’s direct attacks, climbs and knocks. The moat is deep and wide and at the top of the walls there are the elite Wu family warriors. Hence, even though the Zhao army is more than 10 times bigger, they are still not confident of breaking into the stockade. Their only advantage is that they have unlimited reinforcements that is enough to let them have a long battle of stamina.

Although Xiang Shaolong and the rest have the convenience of the underground tunnel, they have already transported all their store of rations inside, while the farmers outside the stockade have to escape to Qin, so they've now become a lone army. However their aim is just to defend for a short period of time, so they are feeling lighthearted, and to them this is just a game with the Zhaos of defending the city.

Xiang Shaolong looked at the grandly approaching Zhao army with their shields up and asked with furrowed brow, "Why don't they cut off the water source to the moat, instead they're going through the trouble of crossing the moat?"

Wu Zhuo said with a laugh, "This is a live river, we need not irrigate water in. There is a spring supplying water beneath the moat and they can't stop the water supply even if they want to."

Xiang Shaolong was enlightened, his knowledge grew with each experience.

Teng Yi said calmly, "The way to break this is to divert the flow of the water, but that will take at least 10 odd days to complete. I'm guessing that they are swiftly trying to build mobile bridges at the back end to put across the moats to make it more convenient for attacking the stockade."

Xiang Shaolong asked quizzically, "Then those people below are just putting up a show?"

Teng Yi explained, "A besieging army fears boredom the most, so there is a need to make them move. They can take it as a form of stretching or

exercise, as that's the only way to maintain morale."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head to indicate his understanding. In a war, a person's psychology cannot be neglected, it's the same in the past and for the future.

The Zhao army below gave a shout as they charged forward until they reached the bank of the moat and squatted down, hiding behind their shields. Thousands of archers charged behind them and after hiding behind those shields, raised their bows to shoot and for a moment arrows rained down on the walls.

Teng Yi gave an order and the Wu family warriors all hid behind the ditches and did not return the strike.

Teng Yi shouted in a voice even louder than that cursing officer, "Prepare sand! Fire extinguishing teams get ready."

Before he could finish his words, another 2000 odd soldiers from the enemy side dashed out and shot at the city walls with burning arrows.

The attack on the stockade finally started.

Both sides used burning rocks to attack each other, the outer walls and top of the stockade bore the damage made by the impact and the fire but it's just superficial damage, the basic structure is not affected at all. The Wu family warriors are on higher grounds and has sufficient rocks so their defense was tight with minimal casualties whereas the Zhaos had more than a thousand

dead or injured within a day, a heavy cost to pay.

Until now, the King of Zhao and Zhao Mu still cannot understand why their opponent is so well prepared. They have been secretly keeping an eye on the movements in the Wu family and only saw people and rations being moved out of the stockade but nothing has been transported in.

They could not imagine the existence of the underground tunnel, so they can't be considered stupid. Firstly, it's almost impossible to build such a long underground tunnel. Also, if there is a underground tunnel, Xiang Shaolong and the rest will have no reason to stay here. How could they have guessed that this is the most crucial factor in Xiang Shaolong's plan.

News came that night that the Qin army is near the border and the King of Zhao was so frightened that he hurriedly forced his generals to attack the stockade relentlessly day and night.

On the 10th day, after suffering heavy losses, the Zhaos finally successfully built 3 mobile bridges for crossing the moat and moved their ladders in to climb and attack the stockade walls as well as use huge logs to batter the stockade gates.

The Wu family warriors used rocks and fire weapons to return the attack and also used a weapon resembling a long hook to deal with those enemies climbing up, as well as pouring cauldrons of boiling water and oil down. After killing and injuring almost 2000 of their enemies, the Zhaos retreated, only defending the 3 wooden bridges.

About 50 odd men died and a hundred odd injured on the Wu family's side.

Those injured were immediately transported out of the city.

Only now did Xiang Shaolong truly feel that in a war, one person's strength is so minuscule and to him, it certainly does not feel good.

By the 20th day, the Zhaos finally managed to divert the flow of the water after which they spent another 3 days to fill up and flatten the moat with soil and rocks. The Wu family stockade has lost its advantage.

The Zhaos launched their attack, pushing the armored battle vehicles used for attacking cities over the flattened moat.

These battle vehicles came in various types with the most formidable being the Climbing City Vehicle, Smashing Vehicle and Flying Platform.

The Climbing City Vehicle is about as high as the city wall so that the enemy can swiftly reach the top of the walls in the vehicle; the Smashing Vehicle has a sturdy log on it and used to smash continuously on the city gates and walls; the Flying Platform is for the use of the archers to attack the defending soldiers at the top of the walls.

The only way to deal with this is to use huge rocks to attack them.

In less than 2 days, all the huge rocks have been used up. Xiang Shaolong gave orders to retreat.

By the time the Zhao army entered the city, the whole Wu family stockade has been set ablaze. Because the buildings have all been smeared with oil, they can't extinguish the fire even if they wanted to.

The Zhaos looked on as the fire burned for 10 days and what remained were charred and totally destroyed buildings burnt down to the last tile. They couldn't describe their feelings but in any case, they definitely did not feel good.

More than 8000 Zhaos perished with another 10,000 odd injured. The whole country was in shock.

The Wu family have always enjoyed good reputation among the common Zhao people and now that the King of Zhao had forced them to rebel, there were naturally lots of complaints.

By the time the King of Zhao found out the underground tunnel leading out of the city from amongst the rubbles and realized that he has fallen for Xiang Shaolong's trick, it's already more than a month later.

Although the King of Zhao was fuming, there was nothing he could do.

At this time he did feel a small sense of regret. Such a capable man like Xiang Shaolong, not only did he not make good use of him, but have now given him away to the Qins. How torturous indeed!

End of Book 05